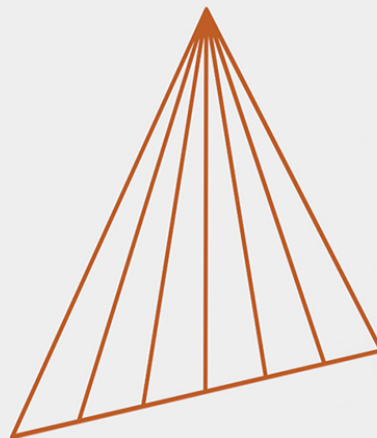




Emotional Intelligence

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Energy and Motivation

HBR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE SERIES

The Power of Progress

An interview with Teresa Amabile by Sarah Green Carmichael

Teresa Amabile, Harvard Business School professor and a coauthor of *The Progress Principle*, explains the importance of small wins at work in this edited interview with HBR's Sarah Green Carmichael.

Sarah Green Carmichael: *What is the progress principle?*

Teresa Amabile: It's the surprising impact of simply making forward movement on meaningful work, on the people who are doing the work. My coauthor, Steven Kramer, and I studied nearly 12,000 daily diaries of people working on creative project teams to look at their inner work life. *Inner work life* is our term for the perceptions, emotions, and motivations that people experience as they react to and make sense of the events in their workday.

What we found was that when people's inner work lives were more positive, they performed better. We asked ourselves, if inner work life has such an impact on performance, what leads to good inner work life? We found that, of all the things that can drive people in their work and make them feel good about it, the single most important is simply making progress on work that they find meaningful. That's the progress principle.

That sounds simple, but I think we've all had days when we felt like we weren't making much progress. So how much progress do you really need to make to get that feeling?

Surprisingly little. We call this the power of small wins. For example, a computer programmer was trying to track down a bug in a program, and simply solving that little problem led to an extraordinarily positive inner work life that day. Tackling that bug yielded great emotions, very powerful motivation, and positive perceptions of the work environment. Fixing a bug is a seemingly small thing. But we found that 28% of really minor—seemingly trivial—events had a strong impact on people's inner work lives in the positive direction and, unfortunately, in the negative direction, too.

What happens when that negative direction takes hold?

Unfortunately, with all kinds of work events, negative is stronger than positive. The negative inner work life impact of having a setback, for example, is two to three times stronger than the positive impact of making progress. So it's particularly important to avoid the minor hassles that can derail people's work during the average workday.

If you'd like to harness the power of these small wins and hopefully avoid some of the hassles, and you'd like to feel like you're making more progress, what should you do?

There's a lot that people can do for themselves to try to harness the progress principle. The most important is to focus. Many people in organizations are under a lot of time pressure, feeling high workload pressure. It's really easy to slip into being on a treadmill. That's our term for running all the time, feeling like you're juggling a lot of balls that are thrown at you, but not making real progress on the important work that's really going to use your creative brain, and that the organization really needs to become the innovative leader in its field.

Each of us should try to preserve at least 30 to 60 minutes a day when we're not going to be distracted by other demands, when we can really focus on the work that's most meaningful to us and most important to the organization. Sometimes that means you have to come in a half hour before anyone else or stay a half hour later. Sometimes you need to go to a coffee shop or find an unused conference room, just to get that focus.

The other thing you can do is keep track of your small wins each day. That can be very motivational.

TERESA AMABILE is a Baker Foundation Professor at Harvard Business School. Her current research program focuses on psychological and social aspects of the retirement transition. **SARAH GREEN CARMICHAEL** is an editor and columnist at Bloomberg Opinion and a former executive editor at *Harvard Business Review*. Follow her on Twitter [@skgreen](https://twitter.com/skgreen).

Adapted from "The Power of Progress," on hbr.org, August 9, 2011.

Managing the Hidden Stress of Emotional Labor

By Susan David

Apart from *Sesame Street*'s Oscar the Grouch, very few of us have the luxury of being able to be completely and utterly ourselves all the time at work. The rest of us are called upon to perform what psychologists call "emotional labor"—the effort it takes to keep your professional game face on when what you're doing is not concordant with how you feel. We do this outside the office too (making polite chitchat in the elevator when you're feeling tired and surly comes to mind), but it is perhaps more important at work because most of us are there many hours per week, and our professional images and livelihoods depend on it.

For example, your boss makes a meant-to-be inspiring comment about doing more with less, and you smile and nod, but what you'd like to do is upend the conference table. A customer talks down to you about the poor service she says she received, and you're unfailingly polite and solicitous, even though you resent being patronized. Or perhaps you simply had a poor night's sleep, yet you push yourself to remain energetic and upbeat because you've been told—more often than you care to count—that "great" leaders bring positivity and inspiration to their team.

Emotional labor is a near universal part of every job, and of life; often it's just called being polite. However, the extent to

which one acts makes a meaningful difference. A person can “deep act” in a way that is still connected with their core values and beliefs at work (“Yes, the customer is being patronizing, but I empathize with her and care about solving her problem”) or “surface act” (“I’ll be nice here, but deep down I’m really spitting nails”).

Research shows that the tendency to engage in this latter aspect of emotional labor—surface acting, in which there is a high level of incongruity between what people feel and what they show, through either faking or suppressing their emotions—comes with real costs to the person and the organization. When people habitually evoke the stress of surface acting, they’ll be more prone to depression and anxiety, decreased job performance, and burnout. This has an effect on others, too: Leaders who surface act at work are more likely to be abusive to their employees, by belittling them and invading their privacy, for example. And job stress can spill over into home life. In one study of hotel employees who did a lot of surface acting on the job (“Yes, ma’am, I’d be delighted to bring you a fluffier robe!”), their spouses were more likely to see their partners’ work as a source of conflict and to wish they would find another job, in the hopes that their relationship would be less strained.¹

There are common contexts in which surface acting comes about, including:

- A mismatch between your personality (for example, level of introversion or extroversion) and what is expected from you in your role
- A misalignment of values, when what you’re being asked to do doesn’t accord with what you believe in
- A workplace culture in which particular ways of expressing emotion (what psychologists call “display rules”) are endorsed—or not

The ideal, of course, would be to work in a job to which you are so well suited that your actions and feelings are always in perfect harmony, eliminating the need for you to be exhaustingly inauthentic all day. In real life, however, the goal of keeping your surface acting to a minimum and instead engaging in deep acting, where the role is aligned with who you truly are, is a more attainable one. Assuming you find meaning in the work you do and don't feel you're in the entirely wrong field, here are some things you can do at work to reduce your emotional labor and feel better about the way you're spending your days.

Remind yourself why you're in the job you're in

Connecting to your larger purpose—you are learning skills that are critical to your overall career; you're in a dull but stable job right now because your children need health insurance and being a good parent is important to you—will help you feel more connected to your work.

Explore “want to” thinking

It's easy to fall into a “time to make the donuts” mentality, thinking of all work as something you “have to” do. And most of us don't have the financial resources for work to truly be optional. But allowing yourself to appreciate the aspects of your job that give you a charge—maybe it's brainstorming with colleagues or making systems more efficient—elevates your work into something you choose to do, rather than something required of you. To be clear, I am not suggesting you “just think positive” or try to rationalize away real concerns. But do become more aware of the subtle traps of language in which work tasks, even ones you might enjoy, are framed as chores. If you can't find a true “want to” in key components of your work, it may be a sign that change is in order.

Do some job crafting

Consider whether you can work with your manager to tweak your job so that it's more aligned with what is of value to you. For example, if, when you visit the satellite offices of your firm, you're stimulated by the new people you meet and their different ways of doing things, perhaps you could propose a project that could involve more of these kinds of visits. The goal is to make your job more interesting so that less emotional labor is required.

When we typically think of stress at work, we focus on time pressures, information overload, and change as the causes. Yet the emotional labor that you invest in your job can be a significant source of demand and is worth considering and managing.

SUSAN DAVID is a founder of the Harvard/McLean Institute of Coaching, is on the faculty at Harvard Medical School, and is recognized as one of the world's leading management thinkers. She is the author of the number one *Wall Street Journal* bestseller *Emotional Agility*. An in-demand speaker and adviser, David has worked with the senior leadership of hundreds of major organizations, including the United Nations, Ernst & Young, and the World Economic Forum.

Note

1. Morgan A. Krannitz et al., "Workplace Surface Acting and Marital Partner Discontent: Anxiety and Exhaustion Spillover Mechanisms," *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* 20, no. 3 (2015): 314-325.

Adapted from content posted on hbr.org, September 8, 2016 (product #H034C1).

How to Make Yourself Work When You Just Don't Want To

By Heidi Grant

There's that project you've left on the back burner—the one with the deadline that's growing uncomfortably near. And there's the client whose phone call you really should return—the one who does nothing but complain and eat up your valuable time. Wait, weren't you going to try to go to the gym more often this year?

Can you imagine how much less guilt, stress, and frustration you would feel if you could somehow just make yourself do the things you don't want to do when you are actually supposed to do them? Not to mention how much happier and more effective you would be?

The good news (and it's very good news) is that you can get better about not putting things off if you use the right strategy. Figuring out which strategy to use depends on why you are procrastinating in the first place. Here are some of the most likely reasons.

Reason #1: You are putting something off because you are afraid you'll screw it up.

Solution: Adopt a "prevention focus."

There are two ways to look at any task. You can do something because you see it as a way to end up better off than you are now—as an achievement or accomplishment. As in, “If I complete this project successfully I will impress my boss,” or “If I work out regularly, I will look amazing.” Psychologists call this a **promotion focus**, and research shows that when you have one, you are motivated by the thought of making gains, and you work best when you feel eager and optimistic. Sounds good, doesn’t it? Well, if you are afraid you will screw up on the task in question, this is *not* the focus type for you. Anxiety and doubt undermine promotion motivation, leaving you less likely to take any action at all.

What you need is a way of looking at what you need to do that *isn’t* undermined by doubt but rather, ideally, thrives on it. When you have a **prevention focus**, instead of thinking about how you can end up better off, you see the task as a way to hang on to what you already have—to avoid loss. For the prevention focused, successfully completing a project is a way to keep your boss from being angry or thinking less of you. Working out regularly is a way to not “let yourself go.” Decades of research, which I describe in my book *Focus*, shows that prevention motivation is actually enhanced by anxiety about what might go wrong. When you are focused on avoiding loss, it becomes clear that the only way to get out of danger is to take immediate action. The more worried you are, the faster you are out of the gate.

I know this doesn’t sound like a barrel of laughs, particularly if you are usually more the promotion-minded type, but there is probably no better way to get over your anxiety about screwing up than to give some serious thought to all the dire consequences of doing nothing at all. So go on, scare the pants off yourself. It feels awful, but it works.

Reason #2: You are putting something off because you don't feel like doing it.

Solution: Make like Spock and ignore your feelings. They're getting in your way.

In his excellent book *The Antidote: Happiness for People Who Can't Stand Positive Thinking*, Oliver Burkeman points out that often when we say things like "I just can't get out of bed early in the morning," or "I just can't get myself to exercise," what we really mean is that we can't get ourselves to *feel* like doing these things. After all, no one is tying you to your bed every morning. Intimidating bouncers aren't blocking the entrance to your gym. Physically, nothing is stopping you; you just don't feel like it. But as Burkeman asks, "Who says you need to wait until you 'feel like' doing something in order to start doing it?"

Think about that for a minute, because it's really important. Somewhere along the way, we've all bought into the idea—without consciously realizing it—that to be motivated and effective we need to *feel* like we want to take action. We need to be eager to do so. I really don't know why we believe this, because it is 100% nonsense. Yes, on some level you need to be committed to what you are doing—you need to want to see the project finished, or get healthier, or get an earlier start to your day. But you don't need to *feel like doing it*.

In fact, as Burkeman points out, many of the most prolific artists, writers, and innovators have become successful in part because of their reliance on work routines that forced them to put in a certain number of hours a day, no matter how uninspired (or, in many instances, hungover) they might have felt. Burkeman reminds us of renowned artist

Chuck Close's observation that "Inspiration is for amateurs. The rest of us just show up and get to work."

So if you're sitting there, putting something off because you don't feel like doing it, remember that you don't actually *need* to feel like it. There is nothing stopping you.

Reason #3: You are putting something off because it's hard, boring, or otherwise unpleasant.

Solution: Use if-then planning.

Too often, we try to solve this particular problem with sheer will: *Next time, I will make myself start working on this sooner.* Of course, if we actually had the willpower to do that, we would never put it off in the first place. Studies show that people routinely overestimate their capacity for self-control and rely on it too often to keep them out of hot water.

Do yourself a favor and embrace the fact that your willpower is limited. Your will may not always be up to the challenge of getting you to do things you find difficult, tedious, or otherwise awful. Instead, use **if-then planning** to get the job done.

Making an if-then plan is more than just deciding what specific steps you need to take to complete a project: It's also deciding where and when you will take those steps. For example:

If it is 2 p.m., then I will stop what I'm doing and start work on the report Bob asked for. If my boss doesn't mention my request for a raise at our meeting, then I will bring it up again before the meeting ends.

By deciding in advance *exactly* what you're going to do—and when and where you're going to do it—there's no

deliberating when the time comes. There's no *Do I really have to do this now? Or Can this wait till later? Or Maybe I should do something else instead*. It's when we deliberate that willpower becomes necessary to make the tough choice. If-then plans dramatically reduce the demands placed on your willpower by ensuring that you've made the right decision way ahead of the critical moment. In fact, if-then planning has been shown in more than 200 studies to increase rates of goal attainment and productivity by 200% to 300% on average.

I realize that the three strategies I'm offering you—thinking about the consequences of failure, ignoring your feelings, and engaging in detailed planning—don't sound as fun as advice like “Follow your passion!” or “Stay positive!” But they have the decided advantage of actually being *effective*—which, as it happens, is exactly what you'll be if you use them.

HEIDI GRANT is a social psychologist who researches, writes, and speaks about the science of motivation. She is the director of learning research and development for EY Americas. Her most recent book is *Reinforcements: How to Get People to Help You* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2018). She's also the author of *Nine Things Successful People Do Differently* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2012) and *No One Understands You and What to Do About It* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2015).

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Four Ways to Manage Your Energy More Effectively

By Elizabeth Grace Saunders

Almost anyone can muster enough gumption for a short burst of high-energy effort. Maybe it's making a shining impression your first few weeks on a job, hitting the gym with fervor at the start of January, or spending a weekend on a remodeling project exhibiting all the peppiness of an HGTV star.

But what about after that initial burst? Do you still feel the same a few months or even a year into your new job, goal, or project? Have you abandoned your ambitions? Do you continue to push on while fighting signs of fatigue or burnout? Or do you wildly vacillate between hyperproductivity and getting nothing done?

The key to success at work and in life isn't really starting strong; it's staying strong. And one of the keys to having that staying power is the idea of self-regulation. This entails operating within lower and upper boundaries of activity by predetermining the minimum and maximum amount of action you will take toward a specific goal within a certain span of time (such as a day or a week). This keeps you from getting derailed because you dropped off or lost interest, or overdoing it and finding yourself too exhausted to continue.

As a time management coach, I've seen that there are four steps to creating this staying power. When you follow these

steps, you'll be surprised to find that you'll accomplish more of your goals with less effort—and give yourself drive that lasts.

Set Upper and Lower Boundaries

The idea of goal setting is popular, especially at the start of the year. But not many individuals take the time to write out the steps that they will take to achieve their goals. And in my estimation, many fewer take the time to define their daily upper and lower boundaries for each of their goals.

In Greg McKeown's book *Effortless*, he suggests the idea of making concrete boundaries for both how little and how much you will do in a given day on your important priorities—for instance, for hitting sales numbers, you may determine to never make fewer than five sales calls in a day and never more than 10 sales calls in a day.

You can extend this into any project or goal that you want to accomplish. For example, if you want to author a book, you might decide to write no less than 30 minutes per day and no more than three hours per day to avoid burning out. Or for exercise, you may decide to work out no less than three times per week and no more than five times per week, so you get a sufficient workout in and also have time for your other priorities like spending time with your family or personal tasks. (For more on investing your time and energy, see the sidebar "[Invest Your Energy](#).”)

These boundaries give you some wiggle room but also give you the ability to stay on track over time. When you're setting your own upper and lower limits, think through what's the least you could do in a particular area to feel like you are keeping up your momentum. The goal on the low end is to not feel like you “stopped” and need to exert extra effort to break the inertia and restart. And when you're defining your upper limits, think about where you need to

limit yourself so that your investment in this particular area doesn't take so much of your time that other areas of your life suffer.

INVEST YOUR ENERGY

By Peter Bregman

We all know what it takes to build and maintain our energy: sleep well, eat right, exercise, and so on. But how often do you think about how strategically you use the energy you have?

The answer for me: not very.

When I'm in a conversation, I almost always share my thoughts. In fact, if I am *near* a conversation, I often share my thoughts. I involve myself in decisions that others could make just as well or better. And when I *am* making decisions, I often delay them, struggling to make them perfect even when there are no right answers.

Those are just my *visible* energy-spending patterns. There's a whole category of *invisible* ones that sap my energy even more, such as holding on to frustrations and hurts well past their due date and worrying about the outcome of things over which I have no control.

Once I started to pay attention, I began to see how carelessly—how indiscriminately—I spend my energy.

When I *invest* my energy, I spend it writing, listening, strategizing, teaching, thinking, planning, offering my opinion selectively and with an outcome in mind, and making decisions swiftly.

It's not simply about productivity. I happily invest my energy in ways that simply bring me joy: my children, reading, interesting conversations with friends, and learning new things for fun, to name a few.

The important thing is to be intentional about where we put our energy so that we apply it to what matters most to us. Here's how:

1. *Notice your energy.* Where do you spend it? I set my phone to beep at random times during the day as a prompt to notice how I'm spending my energy at that moment—both visibly (doing) and invisibly (thinking).

When you look at life with an energy lens, you begin to see things

differently. Simply doing this little energy check-in began to change my habits.

2. *Know what matters to you.* Knowing what brings value to your life—joy and productivity, for me—is essential to making smart decisions about where to invest your energy.
3. *Plan wise energy investment.* Once you know which things matter most to you, schedule as many of them into your life as possible. Put them in your calendar. Let them crowd out activities that represent energy leaks. This idea of “crowding out” works for thinking, too. Where do you want to invest your mental energy? I find that perseverating over things (or people) that annoy me is almost never a useful way to spend energy. But thinking about what I can learn from something almost always is. Let your learning mind crowd out your complaining mind.
4. *Most importantly, plan where **not** to invest your energy.* Once you begin to notice your energy, you will clearly see things you do and ways you think that are pointless energy drains. While it’s surprisingly hard to stop doing something midstream, it’s much less painful to not start in the first place. Think of how much easier it is *not* to turn on the television than to stop watching in the middle of a show.

Don’t enter a conversation that you know will rile you up and get you nowhere.

5. *Don’t spend much time thinking about it.* Optimizing your energy expenditure can become its own counterproductive energy drain. You don’t have to get it right, just better than yesterday. Simply pull yourself out of one useless conversation, stop yourself from responding to one silly email, let go of one nagging thought, and you’ll be a more intelligent investor of your energy.

Sometimes the solution to a problem isn’t to do more. It’s to do less.

Peter Bregman is the CEO of Bregman Partners, an executive coaching company that helps successful people become exceptional leaders and stellar human beings. The bestselling author of *18 Minutes* and *Leading with Emotional Courage*, his most recent book is *You Can Change Other People*.

Understand Your Tendency

When facing a goal, do you tend to get into a high-drive gear and try to remain there 24/7? Do you operate at a low-drive level most of the time, often having to scurry to the finish line at the last minute? Do you find yourself vacillating between extremes where one day you compulsively work until the wee hours of the night, and the next day you crash and do next to nothing?

Depending on your tendency, you can proceed in one of the following three ways:

- For those in the first, high-drive category, you'll need to give yourself permission to be human, to rest, and to have real downtime. Keep a close eye on whether you're going over your upper boundary of activity and headed for burnout.
- For those in the second, low-drive category, keep a close eye on whether or not you're staying above your lower bound. You want to ensure that you're doing at least the minimum before chilling out (as tempting as that may seem).
- For those in the third, fluctuating-drive category, you'll need to keep an eye on both bounds. Avoiding going over your upper bound should prevent you from falling below your lower bound the next day.

As McKeown wisely writes in his book, “Do not do more today than you can completely recover from by tomorrow.”

Build In Rest and Recovery

As humans, we're designed for cycles of activity and rest. That's why we sleep at night, why weekends are an essential part of a productive workweek, and why even elite athletes can't work out every waking hour.

If you're a high-drive individual, you'll need to remain especially conscious about giving yourself planned times of rest and recovery. Since I fall toward this tendency, I make sure that my personal time isn't as jam-packed as my work time. For me, that means viewing my nonwork time not only as time to complete personal tasks, but also as time for rest. For instance, two mornings a week I don't do my normal 5:15 a.m. wakeup for swimming. Instead, I give myself time to contemplate life, read interesting articles, or simply sleep in. I also consciously take time on the weekends and evenings to connect with people without a time limit—just going with the flow and allowing things to take as long as they take.

If you operate at a low-drive level, make sure you've at least hit your lower boundary of activity before taking a break. That means that you can still take ample breaks, but only after you've made progress on a goal.

And if your drive fluctuates, you'll need to remember to have rest and recovery on the days when you feel on top of the world and like you can work 24/7 so that you don't crash the next day. That could include the basics like taking time to eat, moving from your chair by stretching or walking, and not staying up crazy late—no matter how energized you feel. Force yourself to stop when it's a reasonable time for you to go to bed so that you can begin again fresh the next day.

Give Yourself Breathing Room

To have staying power, you need to keep your work within sustainable boundaries—and you need to work at a sustainable pace. There are days when back-to-back meetings are necessary or when you need to go from task to task to task. But for most people, this strategy doesn't have long-term viability.

I encourage you, if at all possible, to have at least a few hours in a day or week where you're not in meetings. And even better, if you can block out larger chunks of time for accomplishing bigger projects, you can give yourself permission to really be immersed in the work without the pressure of a tight time window. For me, I accomplish this goal by taking Wednesday as a day free of coaching calls. That allows me to get specific projects done, such as writing this article. My whole Wednesday is blocked on a recurring basis as "Project Day" so that no one can schedule meetings with me. And I find that if you can work from home or in a private spot on days when you want to do more deep work, then it's usually easier to do so without getting interrupted.

Life isn't a sprint. It's an ongoing journey. And to stay high-performing, healthy, and happy both inside and outside of work, you need to have staying power. Look closely at how you work and follow these tips to ensure that you're working effectively, productively, and within your bounds.

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When Your Motivation Dips, Focus on Results

By Elizabeth Grace Saunders

No matter how generally motivated we are, all of us have some tasks that we don't want to do. Maybe we find them boring, pointless, draining, time-consuming, annoying, or anxiety producing. So how do you get moving in these types of situations?

Find Your Why

The first step is to recognize that getting motivated doesn't mean that you have to experience a particular feeling, like excitement or anticipation. Instead, motivation is simply one or more reasons you have for acting in a certain way. You can decide to do something without ever getting excited about it by finding a personally meaningful *why*.

For example, you could choose to do something because it will:

- Lower your anxiety
- Benefit someone who you care about
- Lead to financial gain
- Avoid a negative consequence
- Make you feel good about yourself

- Clear your mind
- Align with your values
- Reduce stress

These reasons might sound something like this in your day-to-day life:

“I don’t want to do _____. But if I do _____, then I will see a significant financial payoff both now and in the future and will feel good about my choices.”

“I don’t want to do _____. But if I get _____ done, then it will make my boss happy and lower my anxiety every time I have a one-on-one meeting.”

“I don’t want to do _____. But if I make progress on _____, then I will have so much less stress next week and be prepared for _____.”

Even if we never feel particularly motivated by a task, we can find a reason to move forward by looking beyond the task to the results.

Develop a Strategy

The second step for success involves coming up with a strategy for getting tasks done when you have a low to nonexistent emotional drive. Depending on the task and your work style, one or more of these strategies may help. You can consider these methods as tools in your toolbox when you’ve come up with a reason to take action on a task but still feel uncertain on how to complete it.

One set of action-taking methods includes involving other people in the process. This positive social pressure can provide the impetus to get something done. This could look like delegating part of the task, teaming up with someone else to complete the activity together, getting

accountability, or simply being present with other people who are also working. In regard to the last point, for some of my time management coaching clients, this can look like sitting in a library where other people are also getting work done, or even having a virtual session where they work on a task while someone they know is on the other side of a video call also cranking away.

Another set of action-taking methods revolves around how you structure your approach to the work. These types of strategies, each illustrated with an example, can help you to gain momentum when you have low drive to move forward:

- Put a low-frequency activity ahead of a high-frequency activity. For example, I can't open my email until I've filed my expense report.
- Give yourself a standard time. Every Friday from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m., I have time blocked in my calendar for weekly planning, and I honor that time as sacred for that activity.
- Limit the time commitment. I need to work for 10 minutes a day on this task and then I can stop if I want to do so.
- Set the bar low. I just need to take one action step a week on this activity.
- Get it done. I want to get this entirely off my plate, so I'm setting aside a whole day to complete the task.

Pair the Unpleasant with Something Pleasant

A third set of action-taking methods involves pairing unpleasurable activities with pleasurable ones to boost your overall mood. This could involve giving yourself permission to do a more difficult task, like writing or putting together a presentation, in a location you really like, such as a cozy

coffee shop or even a park if the weather is nice. You can also try layering tasks, such as listening to music or a podcast while organizing your office. Even getting a little physical activity in during the process can help. I have been known to practice speeches while going on walks. I probably look a little funny, but I get two activities done at once.

When you employ one or more of these strategies, you may not make speedy progress or perfect progress. But you can move tasks forward, slowly but surely, and get the things done that you don't naturally want to do.

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Minimize Burnout by Making Compassion a Habit

By Annie McKee and Kandi Wiens

I am sick to death of the ridiculous situations I have to deal with at work. The pettiness, the politics, the stupidity—it's out of control. This kind of thing stresses me out to the max."

Stress is a happiness killer. And life is just too short to be unhappy at work. But we hear this kind of thing all the time from leaders in industries as varied as financial services, education, pharmaceuticals, and health care. In our coaching and consulting, we're seeing a spike in the number of leaders who used to love their jobs but now say things like, "I'm not sure it's worth it anymore." They're burned out—emotionally exhausted and cynical—as a result of chronic and acute work stress.

Why is stress on the rise? A lot of it has to do with uncertainty in the world and constant changes in our organizations. Many people are overworking, putting in more hours than ever before. The lines between work and home have blurred or disappeared. Add to that persistent (sometimes even toxic) conflicts with bosses and coworkers that put us on guard and make us irritable. Under these circumstances, our performance and well-being suffer. Work feels like a burden. Burnout is just around the corner. And happiness at work is not even a remote possibility.

Here's the good news: Some people *don't* get burned out. They continue to thrive despite the difficult conditions in their workplace.

Why? The answer lies in part with empathy, an emotional intelligence competency packed with potent stress-taming powers. Empathy is "compassion in action." When you engage empathy, you seek to understand people's needs, desires, and point of view. You feel and express genuine concern for their wellbeing, and then you *act on it*.

One of our studies (Kandi's research on executive-level health-care leaders) confirms this.¹ When asked how they deal with chronic and acute work stress, 91% of the study's executives described how expressing empathy allows them to stop focusing on themselves and connect with others on a much deeper level. Other researchers agree: Expressing empathy produces physiological effects that calm us in the moment and strengthen our long-term sustainability.² It evokes responses in our body that arouse the (good) parasympathetic nervous system, and it reverses the effects of the stress response brought on by the (bad) sympathetic nervous system. So not only do others benefit from our empathy, but we benefit, too.

Based on our research—Annie's with leaders in global companies and Kandi's with health-care leaders—we offer a two-part strategy that can help unleash empathy and break the burnout cycle. First, you need to practice self-compassion. Then you will be ready to change some of your habitual ways of dealing with people so you—and they—can benefit from your empathy.

Practice Self-Compassion

If you really want to deal with stress, you've got to stop trying to be a hero and start caring for and about yourself. Self-compassion involves: (1) seeking to truly *understand*

yourself and what you are experiencing emotionally, physically, and intellectually at work; (2) *caring* for yourself, as opposed to shutting down; and (3) *acting* to help yourself. Here are two practical ways to practice self-compassion:

- *Curb the urge to overwork.* When the pressure is on at work, we're often tempted to work more hours to "get on top of things." But overwork is a trap, not a solution. Just doing more—and more, and more, and more—rarely fixes problems, and it usually makes things worse, because we are essentially manufacturing our own stress. We shut the proverbial door on people and problems, thinking that if we can get away, we can at least do our job without getting caught up in others' drama. When nothing changes or it gets worse, we give up. This is a vicious cycle: Overwork leads to more stress, which leads to isolation, which causes us to give up, which leads to even more stress. So, instead of putting in more hours when you're stressed, find ways to renew yourself. Exercise, practice mindfulness, spend more time with loved ones, and dare we say, get more sleep?
- *Stop beating yourself up.* Stress is often the result of being too hard on ourselves when we fail or don't meet our own expectations. We forget to treat ourselves as living, breathing, feeling human beings. Instead of letting self-criticism stress you out, acknowledge how you feel, acknowledge that others would feel similarly in the same situation, and be kind and forgiving to yourself. Shifting your mindset from *threatened* to *self-compassion* will strengthen your resiliency.

Give Empathy

Taking steps toward self-compassion will prepare you emotionally to reach out to others. But let's face it: Empathy is not the norm in many workplaces. In fact, lack of empathy, even depersonalization of others, are symptoms of the emotional exhaustion that comes with burnout. Here are a few tips to make empathy part of your normal way of dealing with people at work:

- *Build friendships with people you like at work.* Most people can rattle off a dozen reasons why you shouldn't be friends with people at work. We believe just the opposite. Real connections and friendships at work matter—a lot. According to the Harvard Grant Study, one of the longest-running longitudinal studies of human development, having warm relationships is essential to health, well-being, and happiness.³ Other research shows that caring for and feeling cared for by others lowers our blood pressure, enhances our immunity, and leads to overall better health.
- *Value people for who they really are.* The “ridiculous situations” mentioned by the leader at the beginning of this chapter are often the result of miscommunication and misunderstanding. Instead of really listening, we hear what we want to, which is misinformed by biases and stereotypes. It gets in the way of our ability to understand and connect with others. The resulting conflicts cause a lot of unnecessary stress. To prevent this, be curious about people. Ask yourself, “How can I understand where this person is coming from?” Listen with an open mind so that you gain their trust, which is good for your stress level and your ability to influence them.
- *Coach people.* According to research by Richard Boyatzis, Melvin Smith, and 'Alim Beveridge, coaching others has positive psychophysiological effects that

restore the body's natural healing and growth processes and improves stamina.⁴ When we care enough to invest time in developing others, we become less preoccupied with ourselves, which balances the toxic effects of stress and burnout.

- *Put your customers, clients, or patients at the center of your conversations.* If misaligned goals with coworkers is a source of your stress, try physically moving your conversations to a place where you can put other people's needs at the center. One chief medical officer who participated in Kandi's study described a time when he had an intense, stressful argument with two other physicians about the treatment plan for a terminally ill cancer patient. They were in a conference room debating and debating, with no progress on a decision. Seeing that everyone's professional conduct was declining and stress levels were rising, the CMO decided to take the conversation to the patient's room. He sat on one side of the patient's bed, holding her hand. The other two physicians sat on the opposite side of the bed, holding her other hand. They began talking again, but this time *literally* with the patient at the center of their conversation. As the CMO said, "The conversation took on a very different tone when we were able to refocus. Everyone was calm. It brought us to the same level. We were connected. It was a very effective antidote to stress."

One caution about empathy and compassion: They can be powerful forces in our fight against stress—until they aren't. Caring too much can hurt. Overextending your empathy can take a toll on your emotional resources and lead to compassion fatigue, a phenomenon that occurs when compassion becomes a burden and results in even more stress. So pay close attention to your limits and develop

strategies to rein in excessive empathy if it gets out of control.

It's worth the risk, though. Once you commit to caring about yourself, you can start to care about others, and in the process, you will create resonant relationships that are both good for you and good for the people you work with.

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The More You Energize Your Coworkers, the Better Everyone Performs

By Wayne Baker

How much energy do you have at work? Do you feel invigorated and engaged or down and disengaged? Either way, the reason might be your coworkers: They are infecting you with their energy, positive or negative.

We “catch” energy through our interactions with people—something called “relational energy”—and it affects our performance at work. This is what my colleagues Bradley Owens, Dana Sumpter, Kim Cameron, and I learned.¹ We were motivated to do this research because energy is a vital personal and organizational resource, but research on the sources of energy have neglected a source that everyone experiences in everyday life—our relationships with others. In a series of four empirical studies, we sought to establish relational energy as a valid scientific construct and evaluate its impact on employee engagement and job performance.

To understand how this works, think of people in your workplace who buoy you up, who lift your spirits. What do they do? What do they say? Some people are energizing because they give off positive vibes. As an employee in a large company told us about his boss, “She energized me because she loved her job and was in general a very happy

person. She always came in with a smile on her face, which created a positive atmosphere.” Others energize us because they create genuine connections. In conversations, for example, they devote their full attention and listen carefully.

If you have an energizing boss, chances are that you feel engaged at work. Focusing on relational energy between leaders and members of a large healthcare organization, we found that the experience of relational energy with a leader increases one’s motivation at work, attention to tasks, and absorption in work activities. This translates into higher work performance. Members of this health-care company who experienced relational energy with their leaders were more engaged at work, which then led to higher productivity.

Interactions are energizing in several ways, as Rob Cross, Andrew Parker, and I learned in a series of studies of energy in organizations.² They include instances when we create a positive vision, when we contribute meaningfully to a conversation, when people are fully present and attentive, and when we have an interaction that gives us a sense of progress and hope.

You are a source of relational energy as well as a recipient. When you generate relational energy in the workplace, your performance goes up. Rob Cross and I discovered this in research we did on energy mapping, using organizational network analysis to reveal the network of energy in the workplace.³ The more people you energize, the higher your work performance. This occurs because people want to be around you. You attract talent, and people are more likely to devote their discretionary time to your projects. They’ll offer new ideas, information, and opportunities to you first.

The opposite is also true. If you de-energize others, people won’t go out of their way to work with you or to help you. In the worst case, they might even sabotage you at work.

What can you do to increase relational energy in your workplace? Here are four actions you can take personally and as a leader.

Build high-quality connections

By definition, high-quality connections generate relational energy. Jane Dutton and Emily Heaphy suggest several ways you can grow and improve high-quality connections, such as taking on a challenge at work with a group of like-minded people.⁴ In one case, two operational leaders at Kelly Services, a workforce solutions firm, created a business resource group to promote leadership development and increase employee engagement. As Dutton and Heaphy describe, the leaders focused on building high-quality connections and strengthening social capital as ways to improve the leadership pipeline.

Create energizing events

Organize and run events with an explicit focus on creating energy, not just on delivering content, products, or services. Consider how Zingerman's, a renowned community of food-related businesses in Ann Arbor, Michigan, infuses energy in its seminars and events. I often bring groups of executives to its restaurant, the Roadhouse. After dinner, CEO and cofounder Ari Weinzweig or one of his managing partners will present on a particular topic, such as visioning, open book management, or the natural laws of business. The content and delivery are fantastic and energizing themselves. But energy goes up another level when a panel of frontline staff come into the room and field questions. They can answer any question, but what matters even more is the energy they exude. They are positive, enthusiastic, and clearly love their work and the organization. The

executives leave the event abuzz with energy because it's so contagious.

Use tools that promote a “giver” culture

The act of helping someone at work creates energy in the form of positive emotions—the “warm glow” of helping. Receiving help creates energy in the form of gratitude. Gratitude for help received encourages paying it forward and helping others, as Nat Bulkley and I documented in a large-scale study.⁵ The Reciprocity Ring, a group-level exercise involving giving and getting help that my spouse, Cheryl Baker, CEO of Humax, created, elevates giver behaviors—and energy. In a pilot study Adam Grant and I conducted, we found that participation in the Reciprocity Ring increases positive emotions and decreases negative emotions.

Try mapping relational energy

Organizational network surveys map the invisible network behind the organizational chart—the real way people interact. Some years ago, Rob Cross and I started adding an energy question to the usual set of network questions we asked in our organizational research and consulting. Presenting each respondent with a list of names of others in the organization, we asked, “When you interact with each person, how does it affect your energy?” Responses could range from “very energizing” to “neutral” to “very de-energizing.” The resulting data enabled us to draw relational energy maps of an organization. The results are quite revealing. In a large petrochemical company, for example, we found a lot of de-energizing relationships—and most of them emanated from the leaders. With this objective map, they could identify where they needed to make positive improvements. Energy maps help you target where to focus

on building high-quality connections, creating energizing events, and using tools that create an energizing giver culture.

So if you feel like you have an energy crisis in your organization, the good news is that you can do something about it by focusing on relational energy—the energy we get and give in our daily interactions. Every action and word, no matter how small, matters in boosting productivity and performance.

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How Women at the Top Can Renew Their Mental Energy

By Merete Wedell-Wedellsborg

For women with leadership ambitions, there is no shortage of advice for how to reach the top. By learning to lean in, speak out, negotiate, delegate, and a dozen other behaviors, women everywhere are launching themselves through the glass ceilings of their organizations, landing jobs at or near the C-suite level.

But what happens *after* the promotion? While top-level jobs are tough on everyone, the transition to senior management comes with extra challenges for women. Some are psychological, pertaining to gender differences in risk-taking and self-confidence. Others are structural; in parenting, for instance, childcare and domestic duties are still disproportionately shouldered by the female partner. While these barriers affect women at all levels of the organization, they are particularly pronounced in the pressure-cooker environment at the top, putting women at a disadvantage.

Dealing with this challenge is something I am deeply familiar with. I am a certified organizational psychologist with a PhD in business economics. For more than 20 years, I have served as an executive coach to hundreds of senior women leaders, many of them working in heavily male-dominated environments such as banking, the military, and

the police force. My work has given me some insights into how women leaders can improve their chances of success once they have reached the top.

At the center is managing your mental energy: how to gain it, maintain it, and not drain it. The three tactics that my female clients have used to succeed in the particular context of a top-level job are knowing your superchargers, finding a work ally, and reducing your anxiety levels.

Know Your Psychological Superchargers

Like it or not, in all but the most evolved organizations, the idea of maintaining a work-life balance at the very top is simply fictional. As Alexandra, a U.S. hedge fund partner, told me: “If you want balance, go be a yoga nidra instructor.” Another top management team I worked with had the motto “Deliver or Die”; there was little doubt as to where “me time” belonged in that particular team’s list of priorities. Given this brutal reality, combined with the extra domestic burdens imposed on many women, how do female top leaders manage to recharge their batteries?

Part of the answer lies in realizing that not all sources of energy are equal. Specifically, some activities are what I call “psychological superchargers”—that is, activities that yield a disproportionately bigger energy boost than others. The nature of these superchargers varies from person to person—I’ll share some examples shortly—but consistently, the most successful women I’ve worked with figured out what theirs were and made sure to tap into them regularly.

In looking for your own superchargers, keep two things in mind: First, set aside culturally mandated ideas about what women are supposed or not supposed to gain energy from (spoiler alert: spending time with kids is not always a net contributor to your mental reserves), and look instead to your quirkier sides. One leader I worked with got her mental

boost from filling out a type of paint-by-numbers mandala drawing; for her, it was an almost meditative activity. Another leader found it hugely energizing to browse executive education programs she might sign up for, as if perusing intellectual holiday destinations. As she told me, “I get my fix from the way it makes the world feel bigger.” A third one found energy in literature and in following new trends in a totally different field.

Second, indulge your inner hedonist. On the personality tests I use, many of the female leaders I coach score very low on hedonism-related measures. They are highly conscientious people, a trait that served to get them into the top job, but they also have a tendency to forget having fun and enjoying life. Perhaps for that reason, superchargers not uncommonly involve a bit of lavish spending. Senior leadership positions tend to come with bigger paychecks, and while your instinct might be to save the money, don’t forget that occasional self-indulgent spending can be a good investment, too.

Find a Work Ally

Your personal life, of course, is not the only source of energy; under the right conditions, your work can also contribute to your mental reserves. This is especially true if your team is characterized by what Harvard Business School’s Amy Edmondson calls psychological safety; that is, the sense that your teammates are on your side, and that it’s safe to make mistakes or say something stupid within the group.¹

The problem is, those conditions are generally not present at the top. Senior leadership teams are often political, and failures typically have much larger consequences. And while it is possible to build a real sense of team spirit at the top with time and effort, new team members can rarely count

on partaking in it before they've proven themselves. What, then, can be done to create a psychological work environment that helps maintain your energy?

The answer, I've found, is to abandon the idea that your team as a whole can serve as a safe place. Instead, concentrate on gaining a single close ally—that is, a person in your team that you feel free to discuss things with behind the scenes and use as an outlet for the inevitable frustrations that come with the job. The successful senior-level women I've worked with can immediately answer the question, “Who can you speak freely to?”—and they are deliberate about cultivating these relationships, using them to maintain their energy as part of the day-to-day.

With luck, you may have an ally on the team already. But if you don't, there are ways you can speed up the process of creating such a relationship. First, don't necessarily focus on gender. It may feel natural to try to ally yourself with another woman (if the team has one). But what I've found to be more important than gender is shared values: that the other person is someone you can relate to on a deeper level, and someone you can feel free to share a laugh with. Alliances of this nature have strong parallels to friendships—some of my clients refer to them as “work marriages”—and their formation often transcends more superficial commonalities.

Second, make your own particular passions known. Alexandra, the hedge fund partner, had colleagues who were obsessed with American football, but as she told me: “I never talk about sports. It doesn't interest me.” Instead, she regularly brought up the things she cared about and sought out the individuals who responded to those things, building her relationships based on authentic commonalities.

Finally, create opportunities to talk to people one-on-one, outside of the usual work setting. For some, this means sharing a car ride to an off-site or making sure you get a seat next to each other on a long flight. Daily routines can

help, too: Some of my clients have built alliances through exercising together or carpooling on their way to or from work, using that time to discuss new ideas or figuring out how to cope with the political game around them. There is something about such “offstage” periods that promotes opening up and sets the stage for creating stronger bonds.

Overcome Anxiety by Channeling Your Values

Risk-taking is part and parcel of corporate careers, and few people, men or women, enter the top ranks of the organization without having made a bold gamble or two along the way. But at the top, the nature of risk-taking changes significantly. There is a lot more at stake; there are much larger degrees of uncertainty around the choices you’ll have to make; and decisions might require you to stand alone, going against an otherwise unified group of people with more seniority in the role.

In my experience, women struggle with this shift a lot more than men, to the point where anxiety becomes an overriding emotion in their new role. This creates a double handicap. As an always-on background emotion, anxiety becomes a major energy leech, constantly siphoning off your mental surplus. At the same time, when your anxiety level is high, it is difficult to take chances with new approaches, or even to see the situation with clear eyes. So, how should female leaders find the daily courage to step up to the plate, make tough choices, or stand alone on an issue—all while not allowing the pressure to drain away their energy?

It’s all rooted in your larger motivation: Do you focus on your career, aiming to maintain or even improve your position or political standing in the group? Or do you focus more on making a difference? Paradoxically, I find that women who focus on their career as their main goal are less

likely to be truly impactful as a leader. When your biggest aim is to avoid visible failures, the temptation to play it safe can lead to a career dominated by perpetual anxiety and by a fatal tendency to shy away from the tough career-defining calls.

In comparison, the successful top-level women I've coached were certainly mindful of their careers. But they didn't see it as an end goal. Rather, they saw it as a tool to create results, changes, and breakthroughs around things they really cared about. Their focus on doing what's right created a mental bulwark against the more extreme degrees of anxiety, allowing them to keep calm under pressure and save their energy for where it was most needed.

For that reason, ask yourself: What can I vouch for? The ability to have the courage of your convictions is essential, as is having the nerve to follow a path—not because it is the easiest and most pleasant way to go, but because it represents the right solution when things are chaotic and difficult. Even in the stormiest sea, there is a calm that comes with staying true to your convictions.

Jointly, the three tactics I have outlined here can make a real difference in terms of managing your energy and succeeding at the top. And in more ways than one, doing so is crucial, because a lot hangs in the balance. Unfairly or not, the women who now enter top management face the added burden of showing that they can perform as well or better than their male peers. It's not enough to shatter the glass ceiling. We need to focus on how more women can reach the top—and how they can perform once they have arrived.

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Five Ways to Focus Your Energy During a Work Crunch

By Amy Jen Su

Work invariably ebbs and flows, cycling between steady states, where we feel more in control of the pace and workload, and peak periods, where the work crunch hits us hard. Unexpected setbacks, project sprints, or even vacations and holidays can create mayhem and tension. Maintaining focus and managing energy levels become critical as tasks pile onto an already full load. When you're in your next work crunch, there are a few things you can do to focus and manage your energy more productively.

Accept the situation

When an acute period hits, it's easy to resist the fact that it's happening. We wish for things to be like they were last month, or we long for the pace we had during vacation. By not being present in the here and now, we drain our energy by ruminating on the situation. In fact, physicists define resistance as "the degree to which a substance or device opposes the passage of an electrical current, causing energy dissipation." In the case of a work crunch, the more you oppose what's happening, the more energy you lose. Acceptance does not mean giving in.¹ On the contrary, it

means acknowledging the reality of the situation with awareness so that you can take clear action.

Observe and label your underlying emotions

Acceptance is particularly difficult given the underlying emotions that an acute work crunch can bring. Negative thoughts such as *I'm not going to do a good job, I don't know if I'll be able to get it all done, or I feel like I'm dropping the ball at both home and work* often predominate. David Rock, director of the Neuro-Leadership Institute, suggests in his book *Your Brain at Work* that, rather than suppressing or denying an emotion, an effective cognitive technique is labeling, whereby you take a situation and put a label on your emotions. "The most successful executives have developed an ability to be in a state of high limbic system arousal and still remain calm," Rock says. "Partly, this is their ability to label emotion states."

The next time you are in a tough work crunch, or you're experiencing a setback at work, take Rock's advice to step back, observe your thinking and emotional state, and assign a word to what's happening, such as "pressure," "guilt," or "worry." By using just one or two words, Rock's research shows, you can reduce the arousal of the limbic brain's fight-or-flight system and instead activate the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for our executive functioning skills.

Preserve your sense of choice and agency

Accepting the situation and labeling our emotions can help to reduce the anxiety that comes with a work crunch. This is critical, because, as research out of the University of Pittsburgh shows, anxiety directly impacts our cognitive functioning, especially those areas responsible for making sound decisions.² Don't fall into a victim mentality, believing

there are no choices or that you don't have control. Instead, bring greater vigilance to assessing your priorities, making tough trade-offs, and incorporating self-care where you can. For example, ask yourself:

- What are the one to two things that are mission critical today?
- What is something I can do to recharge my battery (get to bed early one night this week, listen to my favorite music while working, or catch a nap on a plane)?
- Who or what will I have to say no to during this time?

Communicate with your colleagues and loved ones

Other people can be a real energy drain—or gain—during work crunches and setbacks. Pause and consider how you can renegotiate deadlines, set tighter boundaries, or ask for more support during this time:

- *Renegotiate deadlines.* Loop back with colleagues to ensure that you understand when the other person really needs something and is going to review it. In other cases, if you anticipate not being able to meet a deadline, be sure to inform your colleagues of the new timing or renegotiate it. Keep your integrity by doing what you say you're going to do and being up front about when you need to shift gears.
- *Set tighter boundaries.* Our boundaries and guardrails need to be different during work crunches or acute periods. Let others, both professionally and personally, know when you'll be available or not so they are aware of your more limited schedule.
- *Ask for help and support.* Many of us pride ourselves on not bothering others and being self-reliant. These are great qualities, but there are times when we need to ask

for help. Ask your loved ones for more help on the home front. Share the weight of the accountability for projects with your colleagues by delegating or teaming up, versus doing it all on your own.

Practice self-compassion

Probably the toughest thing of all during a work crunch or setback is how easy it is to beat yourself up, especially when you aren't hitting your high standards for work or time at home. Annie McKee, author of *How to Be Happy at Work* and coauthor of several books on emotional intelligence, says this about self-compassion: "If you really want to deal with stress, you've got to stop trying to be a hero and start caring for and about yourself."

To be truly self-compassionate, especially during an acute period of work stress, accept the situation by acknowledging it with awareness and compassion, observe and label your emotions (don't suppress or deny them), preserve your sense of choice and agency, communicate with your colleagues and loved ones, and ask for help when you need it. By taking these actions, you'll move through your next crunch with greater ease and peace.

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Resilience Is About How You Recharge, Not How You Endure

By Shawn Achor and Michelle Gielan

As frequent travelers and parents of a 2-year-old, we sometimes fantasize about how much work we can do when one of us gets on a plane, undistracted by phones, friends, and *Finding Nemo*. We race to get all our groundwork done: packing, going through security, doing a last-minute work call, calling each other, then boarding the plane. Then, when we try to have that amazing work session in flight, we get nothing done. Even worse, after refreshing our email or reading the same studies over and over, we are too exhausted when we land to soldier on with the emails that have inevitably piled up.

Why should flying deplete us? We're just sitting there doing nothing. Why can't we be tougher—more resilient and determined in our work—so we can accomplish all of the goals we set for ourselves? Based on our current research, we have come to realize that the problem is not our hectic schedule or the plane travel itself; the problem comes from a misunderstanding of what it means to be resilient, and the resulting impact of overworking.

We often take a militaristic, “tough” approach to resilience and grit. We imagine a soldier slogging through the mud, a boxer going one more round, or a football player picking himself up off the turf for one more play. We believe that the

longer we tough it out, the tougher we are, and therefore the more successful we will be. However, this entire conception is scientifically inaccurate.

The very lack of a recovery period is dramatically holding back our collective ability to be resilient and successful. Research has found that there is a direct correlation between lack of recovery and increased incidence of health and safety problems.¹ And lack of recovery—whether by disrupting sleep with thoughts of work or having continuous cognitive arousal by watching our phones—is costing our companies \$62 billion a year (that’s billion, not million) in lost productivity.²

And just because work stops doesn’t mean we’re recovering. We “stop” work sometimes at 5 p.m., but then we spend the night wrestling with solutions to work problems, talking about our work over dinner, and falling asleep thinking about how much work we’ll do tomorrow. In one study, researchers from Norway found that 7.8% of Norwegians have become workaholics.³ The scientists cite a definition of “workaholism” as “being overly concerned about work, driven by an uncontrollable work motivation, and investing so much time and effort to work that it impairs other important life areas.”⁴

We believe that the number of people who fit that definition includes the majority of American workers, which prompted us to begin a study of workaholism in the U.S. Our study will use a large corporate data set from a major medical company to examine how technology extends our working hours and thus interferes with necessary cognitive recovery, resulting in huge health-care costs and turnover costs for employers.

The misconception of resilience is often bred from an early age. Parents trying to teach their children resilience might celebrate a high school student staying up until 3 a.m. to finish a science fair project. What a distortion of resilience! A

resilient child is a well-rested one. When an exhausted student goes to school, they risk hurting everyone on the road with their impaired driving; they don't have the cognitive resources to do well on their English test; they have lower self-control with their friends; and at home, they are moody with their parents. Overwork and exhaustion are the opposite of resilience. And the bad habits we learn when we're young only magnify when we hit the workforce.

In *The Sleep Revolution*, Arianna Huffington wrote, "We sacrifice sleep in the name of productivity, but ironically our loss of sleep, despite the extra hours we spend at work, adds up to 11 days of lost productivity per year per worker, or about \$2,280."⁵

The key to resilience is trying really hard, then stopping, recovering, and then trying again. This conclusion is based on biology. Homeostasis is a fundamental biological concept describing the ability of the brain to continuously restore and sustain well-being.⁶ Positive neuroscientist Brent Furl from Texas A&M University coined the term "homeostatic value" to describe the value that certain actions have for creating equilibrium, and thus well-being, in the body. When the body is out of alignment from overworking, we waste a vast amount of mental and physical resources trying to return to balance before we can move forward.

As Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz have written, if you have too much time in the performance zone, you need more time in the recovery zone, otherwise you risk burnout.⁷ Mustering your resources to "try hard" requires burning energy in order to overcome your currently low arousal level. This is called "upregulation." It also exacerbates exhaustion. The more imbalanced we become due to overworking, the more value there is in activities that allow us to return to a state of balance. The value of a recovery period rises in proportion to the amount of work required of us.

So how do we recover and build resilience? Most people assume that if you stop doing a task like answering emails or writing a paper, your brain will naturally recover, such that when you start again later in the day or the next morning, you'll have your energy back. But surely everyone reading this has had times when you lie in bed for hours, unable to fall asleep because your brain is thinking about work. If you lie in bed for eight hours, you may have rested, but you can still feel exhausted the next day. That's because rest and recovery are not the same thing. Stopping does not equal recovering.

If you're trying to build resilience at work, you need adequate internal and external recovery periods. As researchers Zijlstra, Cropley, and Rydstedt explain: "Internal recovery refers to the shorter periods of relaxation that take place within the frames of the workday or the work setting in the form of short scheduled or unscheduled breaks, by shifting attention or changing to other work tasks when the mental or physical resources required for the initial task are temporarily depleted or exhausted. External recovery refers to actions that take place outside of work—for example, in the free time between the workdays, and during weekends, holidays or vacations."⁸ If after work you lie around on your bed and get riled up by political commentary on your phone or get stressed thinking about deciding how to renovate your home, your brain has not received a break from high mental arousal states. Our brains need a rest as much as our bodies do.

If you really want to build resilience, you can start by strategically stopping. Give yourself the resources to be tough by creating internal and external recovery periods. In *The Future of Happiness*, based on her work at Yale School of Management, Amy Blankson describes how to strategically stop during the day by using technology to control overworking. She suggests downloading the Instant

or Moment apps to see how many times you turn on your phone each day. The average person turns on their phone 150 times every day. If every distraction took only one minute (which would be seriously optimistic), that would account for two-and-a-half hours of every day.

You can use apps like Offtime or Unplugged to create tech-free zones by strategically scheduling automatic airplane modes. In addition, you can take a cognitive break every 90 minutes to recharge your batteries. Try to not have lunch at your desk, but instead spend time outside or with your friends—not talking about work. Take all of your paid time off, which not only gives you recovery periods but raises your productivity and likelihood of promotion.

As for us, we've started using our plane time as a work-free zone, and thus time to dip into the recovery phase. The results have been fantastic. We are usually tired already by the time we get on a plane, and the cramped space and spotty internet connection make work more challenging. Now, instead of swimming upstream, we relax, meditate, sleep, watch movies, journal, or listen to entertaining podcasts. And when we get off the plane, instead of being depleted, we feel rejuvenated and ready to return to the performance zone.

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What You Don't Know About Motivation

By Susan Fowler

At some point in their careers, most leaders have either consciously—or, more likely, unwittingly—based (or justified) their approach to motivation on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow's idea that people are motivated by satisfying lower-level needs, such as food, water, shelter, and security, before they can move on to being motivated by higher-level needs, such as self-actualization, is the most well-known motivation theory in the world.¹ There is nothing wrong with helping people satisfy what Maslow characterized as lower-level needs. Improvements in workplace conditions and safety should be applauded as the right thing to do. Seeing that people have enough food and water to meet their biological needs is the humane thing to do. Getting people off the streets into healthy environments is the decent thing to do. But the truth is, individuals can experience higher-level motivation anytime and anywhere.

Despite the popularity of Maslow's hierarchy, there is not much recent data to support it. Contemporary scientists—specifically Dr. Edward Deci—hundreds of self-determination theory researchers, and thousands of studies instead point to three universal psychological needs. If you really want to take advantage of this new science—rather than focusing on

a pyramid of needs—you should focus on *autonomy*, *relatedness*, and *competence*.

Autonomy is people's need to perceive that they have choices, that what they are doing is of their own volition, and that they are the source of their own actions. The way leaders frame information and situations either promotes the likelihood that a person will perceive autonomy or undermines it. To promote autonomy:

- Frame goals and timelines as essential information to ensure a person's success, rather than as dictates or ways to hold people accountable.
- Refrain from incentivizing people through competitions and games. Few people have learned the skill of shifting the reason why they're competing from an external one (winning a prize or gaining status) to a higher-quality one (an opportunity to fulfill a meaningful goal).
- Don't apply pressure to perform. Sustained peak performance is a result of people acting because they *choose* to—not because they feel they *have* to.

Relatedness is people's need to care about and be cared for by others, to feel connected to others without concerns about ulterior motives, and to feel that they are contributing to something greater than themselves. Leaders have a great opportunity to help people derive meaning from their work. To deepen relatedness:

- Validate the exploration of feelings in the workplace. Be willing to ask people how they feel about an assigned project or goal and listen to their response. All behavior may not be acceptable, but all feelings are worth exploring.
- Take time to facilitate the development of people's values at work—then help them align those values with

their goals. It is impossible to link work to values if individuals don't know what their values are.

- Connect people's work to a noble purpose.

Competence is people's need to feel effective at meeting everyday challenges and opportunities, demonstrating skill over time, and feeling a sense of growth and flourishing. Leaders can rekindle people's desire to grow and learn. To develop people's competence:

- Make resources available for learning. What message does it send about values for learning and developing competence when training budgets are the first casualty of economic cutbacks?
- Set learning goals—not just the traditional results-oriented and outcome goals.
- At the end of each day, instead of asking, “What did you achieve today?” ask, “What did you learn today? How did you grow today in ways that will help you and others tomorrow?”

Unlike Maslow's needs, these three basic needs are not hierarchical or sequential. They are foundational to all human beings and our ability to flourish.²

The exciting message to leaders is that when the three basic psychological needs are satisfied in the workplace, people experience the day-to-day high-quality motivation that fuels employee work passion—and all the inherent benefits that come from actively engaged individuals at work. Taking advantage of the science requires shifting your leadership focus from “What can I give people to motivate them?” to “How can I facilitate people's satisfaction of autonomy, relatedness, and competence?”

Leaders have opportunities every day to integrate these motivational practices. For example, a leader I coach was

about to launch a companywide message to announce mandatory training on green solutions compliance. Ironically, his well-intentioned message dictated people's actions—undermining people's sense of autonomy and probably guaranteeing their defiance rather than compliance. His message didn't provide a values-based rationale or ask individuals to consider how their own values might be aligned to the initiative. After reconsidering his approach, he created this message embedded with ways for people to experience autonomy, relatedness, and competence:

There are three ways you can share our commitment for implementing green solutions as an essential part of our Corporate Social Responsibility initiative.

- *Join others who are passionate about reducing their carbon footprint for a fun and interactive training session on November 15. (Relatedness)*
- *Read the attached manifesto and take a quick quiz to see what you learned by November 18. (Competence)*
- *Send us your story about what you are doing at work to be environmentally responsible by November 14. (Autonomy, competence, and relatedness)*

You can choose any or all three options (Autonomy). Let us know your preference(s) by email (Autonomy) by October 31 or stop by our table at the all-company Halloween party (Relatedness). If you choose to opt out of all three choices (Autonomy), please tell us what we can do to appeal more directly to your values around corporate social responsibility (Relatedness).

Don't underestimate your people's capacity—indeed, their longing—to experience high-quality motivation at work anytime and anywhere.

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Why People Lose Motivation—and What Managers Can Do to Help

By Dan Cable

At some point, every leader has dealt with a person—or, worse, a group of people—who has lost motivation. It's frustrating, isn't it? As much as we've been there ourselves, sometimes it's hard to sympathize with others who are disengaged from work and are unproductive as a result. Sometimes, we view their unhappiness as a bug in their mental makeup—and, therefore, we think they should be able to suck it up and snap out of it.

Although it's easy to fall into this mindset as a leader, this type of thinking is counterproductive, and it ignores the underlying reasons why people lose their passion for what they do (or never find it to begin with).

In order to get at the crux of the problem, it's crucial to understand that as humans we want to feel motivated and to find meaning in the things that we do. It's part of our biology. In fact, there's a part of our brains called the seeking system that creates the natural impulses to learn new skills and take on challenging but meaningful tasks.¹ When we follow these urges, we receive a jolt of dopamine—a neurotransmitter linked to motivation and pleasure—which makes us want to engage in these activities even more.² And, when our seeking systems are activated, we

feel more motivated, purposeful, and zestful.³ We feel more alive.

Exploring, experimenting, learning—this is the way we're supposed to live and work. The problem is, too many workers aren't able to partake in these activities because the way our organizations are run is preventing them from doing so.

Take Tom, a website developer whom I met on a consulting assignment at an accounting firm. When Tom was hired, fresh out of college, he was excited because he had been told that there were opportunities for learning and growth. But the honeymoon didn't last long. "I soon found out my supervisor had no time or patience for experimenting," he told me. "He was more concerned with protocol than personal development. It's like he's afraid of me trying new things because it might not go exactly as planned. It doesn't leave me much room for learning."

At first, Tom wasn't deterred. He worked to improve some processes and tried to inject some personality into his work. But since Tom's boss was under pressure to meet a number of website metrics, she didn't have the flexibility to implement his ideas. As the weeks turned into months, Tom's work became routine and boring, and he shut off as a result.

We shouldn't blame Tom for his reaction, because he reacted the way we're all *designed* to react. Shutting down is our body's way of telling us that we were meant to do better things. To keep exploring and learning. This is our biology; it is a part of our adaptive unconscious to know that our human potential is being wasted.

The key for leaders is to find ways to activate employees' seeking systems. But how do you do it? If you're like Tom's boss, there are likely organizational roadblocks in the way, many of which are probably beyond your control. It's often

impossible to ignore performance metrics or overcome policies and bureaucratic red tape.

Despite these difficulties, it is possible for leaders to activate their employees' seeking systems without a large overhaul to organizationwide policies and culture. And, in my experience working with leaders across the globe, you can reach business objectives while improving the lives of employees. There are three small but consequential nudges that trigger employees' seeking systems: encourage them to play to their strengths, create opportunities to experiment, and help them personalize the purpose of the work.

Self-Expression

Philosophers have been telling us for millennia that people have an innate drive to show others who they really are, yet somehow organizational life often runs afoul of the human desire for self-expression. Even now, when we extol the virtues of creativity and innovation, we still see bureaucratic job titles, inflexible roles, and standardized evaluation systems that generate anxiety instead of excitement and self-expression.

None of us wants to just perform preprogrammed behaviors again and again. We have a deep desire to use our unique skills and perspectives to make our own decisions about how to help our teams succeed. When people are prompted to think about their best traits, their seeking systems are activated. Research shows that when people identify and use their unique strengths, they feel more alive.

Leaders can help employees be their best selves without changing the frames of their jobs. For example, in a study I conducted with colleagues, we found that asking new hires to write down and share stories about times they were at

their best made them feel more comfortable about being themselves around coworkers, and that their unique strengths were valued.⁴ Results showed that newcomers onboarded this way made customers happier and were much less likely to quit in the future.

Employees want to be valued for the unique skills and perspectives they bring to the table, and the more you can reinforce this and remind them of their role in the company at large, the better. And it doesn't take much. At both Make-A-Wish Foundation and Novant Health, for example, leaders encouraged employees to create their own job titles, a move that prompted people to highlight their unique contributions to their teams.

Experimentation

A second way to activate people's seeking systems is to create an experimental safe zone that includes play and supportive social bonding. Play not only stimulates the seeking system but also pushes back anxiety and fear.

Positive emotions are important in their own right, of course. But it's not just that play feels good. Experimental safe zones create intrinsic motivations, which are much more powerful than extrinsic motivations because they unleash creativity. Firms are more agile when they encourage employees to think up new approaches and try them out, and then get feedback about how the environment responded to their ideas.

The research is clear that framing change and innovation as a chance to experiment and learn is better than framing them as a performance situation, which makes people anxious, risk-averse, and less willing to persist through difficulty.⁵ For example, employees in a white-goods manufacturing plant in Italy learned about lean manufacturing by playing with Legos rather than cooktops.

They then experimented with transforming their own production line using the new techniques. In two weeks, the production team made lean manufacturing their own, reducing internal defects by 30% and improving productivity by 25%.

Purpose

The feeling of purpose doesn't come only from curing diseases and improving the world. The feeling of purpose also ignites when we can see the cause and effect between our inputs and our team's progress. For example, a sense of purpose soars when we can offer insights to our team about the environment and what might work better. Likewise, we feel a sense of purpose when we can experience firsthand how our unique contributions help other people and allow the team to progress.

For example, when leaders brought scholarship students into a call center to thank the fundraisers for the money they raised, the fundraisers became more persistent and made a lot more calls on their shifts. And, because they were more personally connected to the reasons for their work, each call was substantially more effective; they raised an average of \$9,704.58 versus \$2,459.44 for fundraisers who did not talk to a scholarship student.⁶

Keep in mind that instilling a sense of purpose doesn't work when it is a one-off. It can't just be a speech by senior leaders who speak during town hall meetings about why their products help customers. Purpose works best when employees get to interact directly with the people they are affecting with their work. For example, employees at Microsoft are encouraged to spend time with clients, understanding their problems and issues firsthand. One account manager spent a week on the street with police officers, for example, trying to understand when and where

remote data could help them. Another account manager spent two days in a hospital to understand what it would really mean to become paperless.

It doesn't take much to light up our seeking systems. For leaders, the upshot is the potential already flowing right under the surface. And it doesn't take charm or motivational speeches to tap into that energy—all it takes is a concerted effort to infuse self-expression, experimentation, and personalized purpose into all that we do.

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Self-Awareness

HBR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE SERIES

The First Component of Emotional Intelligence

By Daniel Goleman

Self-awareness is the first component of emotional intelligence—which makes sense when one considers that the Delphic oracle gave the advice to “know thyself” thousands of years ago. Self-awareness means having a deep understanding of one’s emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs, and drives. People with strong self-awareness are neither overly critical nor unrealistically hopeful. Rather, they are honest—with themselves and with others.

People who have a high degree of self-awareness recognize how their feelings affect them, other people, and their job performance. Thus, a self-aware person who knows that tight deadlines bring out the worst in him plans his time carefully and gets his work done well in advance.

Another person with high self-awareness will be able to work with a demanding client. She will understand the client's impact on her moods and the deeper reasons for her frustration. "Their trivial demands take us away from the real work that needs to be done," she might explain. And she will go one step further and turn her anger into something constructive.

Self-awareness extends to a person's understanding of his or her values and goals. Someone who is highly self-aware knows where he is headed and why; so, for example, he will be able to be firm in turning down a job offer that is tempting financially but does not fit with his principles or long-term goals. A person who lacks self-awareness is apt to make decisions that bring on inner turmoil by treading on buried values. "The money looked good so I signed on," someone might say two years into a job, "but the work means so little to me that I'm constantly bored." The decisions of self-aware people mesh with their values; consequently, they often find work to be energizing.

How can one recognize self-awareness? First and foremost, it shows itself as candor and an ability to assess oneself realistically. People with high self-awareness are able to speak accurately and openly—although not necessarily effusively or confessionally—about their emotions and the impact they have on their work. For instance, one manager I know of was skeptical about a new

personal-shopper service that her company, a major department-store chain, was about to introduce. Without prompting from her team or her boss, she offered them an explanation: “It’s hard for me to get behind the rollout of this service,” she admitted, “because I really wanted to run the project, but I wasn’t selected. Bear with me while I deal with that.” The manager did indeed examine her feelings; a week later, she was supporting the project fully.

Such self-knowledge often shows itself in the hiring process. Ask a candidate to describe a time he got carried away by his feelings and did something he later regretted. Self-aware candidates will be frank in admitting to failure—and will often tell their tales with a smile. One of the hallmarks of self-awareness is a self-deprecating sense of humor.

Self-awareness can also be identified during performance reviews. Self-aware people know—and are comfortable talking about—their limitations and strengths, and they often demonstrate a thirst for constructive criticism. By contrast, people with low self-awareness interpret the message that they need to improve as a threat or a sign of failure.

Self-aware people can also be recognized by their self-confidence. They have a firm grasp of their capabilities and are less likely to set themselves up to fail by, for example, overstretching on assignments. They know, too, when to

ask for help. And the risks they take on the job are calculated. They won't ask for a challenge that they know they can't handle alone. They'll play to their strengths.

Consider the actions of a midlevel employee who was invited to sit in on a strategy meeting with her company's top executives. Although she was the most junior person in the room, she did not sit there quietly, listening in awestruck or fearful silence. She knew she had a head for clear logic and the skill to present ideas persuasively, and she offered cogent suggestions about the company's strategy. At the same time, her self-awareness stopped her from wandering into territory where she knew she was weak.

Despite the value of having self-aware people in the workplace, my research indicates that senior executives don't often give self-awareness the credit it deserves when they look for potential leaders. Many executives mistake candor about feelings for "wimpiness" and fail to give due respect to employees who openly acknowledge their shortcomings. Such people are too readily dismissed as "not tough enough" to lead others.

WHAT MAKES A LEADER?

What distinguishes great leaders from merely good ones? It isn't IQ or technical skills, says Daniel Goleman. It's emotional intelligence: a group of

five skills that enable the best leaders to maximize their own *and* their followers' performance. When senior managers at one company had a critical mass of emotional intelligence (EI) capabilities, their divisions outperformed yearly earnings goals by 20%.

The EI skills are:

- *Self-awareness*: knowing one's strengths, weaknesses, drives, values, and impact on others
- *Self-regulation*: controlling or redirecting disruptive impulses and moods
- *Motivation*: relishing achievement for its own sake
- *Empathy*: understanding other people's emotional makeup
- *Social skill*: building rapport with others to move them in desired directions

We're each born with certain levels of EI skills. But we can strengthen these abilities through persistence, practice, and feedback from colleagues or coaches.

In fact, the opposite is true. In the first place, people generally admire and respect candor. Further more, leaders are constantly required to make judgment calls that require a candid assessment of capabilities—their own and those of others. Do we have the management expertise to acquire a competitor? Can we launch a new product within

six months? People who assess themselves honestly—that is, self-aware people—are well suited to do the same for the organizations they run.

DANIEL GOLEMAN is codirector of the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations at Rutgers University, coauthor of *Primal Leadership: Unleashing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*, and author of *The Brain and Emotional Intelligence: New Insights*, *Leadership: Selected Writings* and *A Force for Good: The Dalai Lama's Vision for Our World*. His latest book is *Altered Traits: Science Reveals How Meditation Changes Your Mind, Brain, and Body*.

Excerpted from “What Makes a Leader?” in *Harvard Business*

Review, January 2004 (product #RO401H).

What Self-Awareness Really Is (and How to Cultivate It)

By Tasha Eurich

Self-awareness seems to have become the latest management buzzword—and for good reason. Research suggests that when we see ourselves clearly, we are more confident and more creative.¹ We make sounder decisions, build stronger relationships, and communicate more effectively.² We're less likely to lie, cheat, and steal.³ We are better workers who get more promotions.⁴ And we're more effective leaders with more satisfied employees and more profitable companies.⁵

As an organizational psychologist and executive coach, I've had a ringside seat to the power of leadership self-awareness for nearly 15 years. I've also seen how attainable this skill is. Yet, when I first began to delve into the research on self-awareness, I was surprised by the

striking gap between the science and the practice of self-awareness. All things considered, we knew surprisingly little about improving this critical skill.

Four years ago, my team of researchers and I embarked on a large-scale scientific study of self-awareness. In 10 separate investigations with nearly 5,000 participants, we examined what self-awareness really is, why we need it, and how we can increase it.

Our research revealed many surprising roadblocks, myths, and truths about what self-awareness is and what it takes to improve it. We've found that even though most people *believe* they are self-aware, self-awareness is a truly rare quality: We estimate that only 10%–15% of the people we studied actually fit the criteria. Three findings in particular stood out, and are helping us develop practical guidance for how leaders can learn to see themselves more clearly.

ABOUT OUR RESEARCH

The major components of our research included:

- Analyzing the results of nearly 800 existing scientific studies to understand how previous researchers defined self-awareness, unearthing themes and trends, and identifying the limitations of these investigations.

- Surveying thousands of people across countries and industries to explore the relationship between self-awareness and several key attitudes and behaviors, like job satisfaction, empathy, happiness, and stress. We also surveyed those who knew these people well to determine the relationship between self ratings and other ratings of self-awareness.
- Developing and validating a *seven-factor, multi-rater assessment of self-awareness*, because our review of the research didn't identify any strong, well-validated, comprehensive measures.
- Conducting in-depth interviews with 50 people who had dramatically improved their self-awareness to learn about the key actions that helped them get there, as well as their beliefs and practices. Our interviewees included entrepreneurs, professionals, executives, and even a *Fortune* 100 CEO. (To be included in our study, participants had to clear four hurdles: (1) they had to see themselves as highly self-aware, which we measured using our validated assessment, (2) using that same assessment, someone who knew them well had to agree, (3) they had to believe they'd experienced an upward trend of self-awareness over the course of their life. Each participant was asked to recall their level of self-awareness at different stages of their life up to their current (for example, early adulthood: ages 19–24, adulthood: ages 25–34, midlife: ages 35–49, mature adulthood: ages 50–80), and

(4) the person rating them had to agree with the participants' recollections.)

- Surveying hundreds of managers and their employees to learn more about the relationship between leadership self-awareness and employee attitudes like commitment, leadership effectiveness, and job satisfaction.

Coauthors of this work are Haley M. Woznyj, Longwood University; Phoenix Van Wagoner, Leeds School of Business, University of Colorado; Eric D. Heggstad, University of North Carolina, Charlotte; and Apryl Brodersen, Metropolitan State University of Denver. We want to thank Dr. Stefanie Johnson for her contributions to our study as well.

#1: There are two types of self-awareness

For the last 50 years, researchers have used varying definitions of self-awareness. For example, some see it as the ability to monitor our inner world, whereas others label it as a temporary state of self-consciousness.⁶ Still others describe it as the difference between how we see ourselves and how others see us.⁷

So before we could focus on how to improve self-awareness, we needed to synthesize these findings and create an overarching definition.

Across the studies we examined, two broad categories of self-awareness kept emerging. The first, which we

dubbed *internal self-awareness*, represents how clearly we see our own values, passions, aspirations, fit with our environment, reactions (including thoughts, feelings, behaviors, strengths, and weaknesses), and impact on others. We've found that internal self-awareness is associated with higher job and relationship satisfaction, personal and social control, and happiness; it is negatively related to anxiety, stress, and depression.

The second category, *external self-awareness*, means understanding how other people view us, in terms of those same factors listed above. Our research shows that people who know how others see them are more skilled at showing empathy and taking others' perspectives. For leaders who see themselves as their employees do, their employees tend to have a better relationship with them, feel more satisfied with them, and see them as more effective in general.

It's easy to assume that being high on one type of awareness would mean being high on the other. But our research has found virtually no relationship between them. As a result, we identify four leadership archetypes, each with a different set of opportunities to improve, as seen in [figure 1](#).

FIGURE 1

The four self-awareness archetypes

This 2 × 2 maps internal self-awareness (how well you know yourself) against external self-awareness (how well you understand how others see you).

	Low external self-awareness	High external self-awareness
High internal self-awareness	INTROSPECTORS They're clear on who they are but don't challenge their own views or search for blind spots by getting feedback from others. This can harm their relationships and limit their success.	AWARE They know who they are, what they want to accomplish, and seek out and value others' opinions. This is where leaders begin to fully realize the true benefits of self-awareness.
Low internal self-awareness	SEEKERS They don't yet know who they are, what they stand for, or how their teams see them. As a result, they might feel stuck or frustrated with their performance and relationships.	PLEASERS They can be so focused on appearing a certain way to others that they could be overlooking what matters to them. Over time, they tend to make choices that aren't in service of their own success and fulfillment.

When it comes to internal and external self-awareness, it's tempting to value one over the other. But leaders must

actively work on both seeing themselves clearly *and* getting feedback to understand how others see them. The highly self-aware people we interviewed were actively focused on balancing the scale.

Take Jeremiah, a marketing manager. Early in his career, he focused primarily on internal self-awareness—for example, deciding to leave his career in accounting to pursue his passion for marketing. But when he had the chance to get candid feedback during a company training, he realized that he wasn't focused enough on how he was showing up. Jeremiah has since placed an equal importance on both types of self-awareness, which he believes has helped him reach a new level of success and fulfillment.

The bottom line is that self-awareness isn't one truth. It's a delicate balance of two distinct, even competing, viewpoints. (If you're interested in learning where you stand in each category, you can take a free shortened version of our multi-rater self-awareness assessment at insight-quiz.com).

#2: Experience and power hinder self-awareness

Contrary to popular belief, studies have shown that people do not always learn from experience, that expertise does not help people root out false information, and that seeing ourselves as highly experienced can keep us from doing our

homework, seeking disconfirming evidence, and questioning our assumptions.⁸

And just as experience can lead to a false sense of confidence about our performance, it can also make us overconfident about our level of self-knowledge. For example, one study found that more experienced managers were less accurate in assessing their leadership effectiveness compared with less experienced managers.⁹

Similarly, the more power a leader holds, the more likely they are to overestimate their skills and abilities. One study of more than 3,600 leaders across a variety of roles and industries found that, relative to lower-level leaders, higher-level leaders more significantly overvalued their skills (compared with others' perceptions).¹⁰ In fact, this pattern existed for 19 out of the 20 competencies the researchers measured, including emotional self-awareness, accurate self-assessment, empathy, trustworthiness, and leadership performance.

Researchers have proposed two primary explanations for this phenomenon.¹¹ First, by virtue of their level, senior leaders simply have fewer people above them who can provide candid feedback. Second, the more power a leader wields, the less comfortable people will be to give them constructive feedback, for fear it will hurt their careers. Business professor James O'Toole has added that, as one's power grows, one's willingness to listen shrinks, either

because they think they know more than their employees or because seeking feedback will come at a cost.¹²

But this doesn't have to be the case. One analysis showed that the most successful leaders, as rated by 360-degree reviews of leadership effectiveness, counteract this tendency by seeking frequent critical feedback (from bosses, peers, employees, their board, and so on).¹³ They become more self-aware in the process and come to be seen as more effective by others.¹⁴

Likewise, in our interviews, we found that people who improved their external self-awareness did so by seeking out feedback from *loving critics*—that is, people who have their best interests in mind *and* are willing to tell them the truth. To ensure they don't overreact or overcorrect based on one person's opinion, they also gut-check difficult or surprising feedback with others.

#3: Introspection doesn't always improve self-awareness

It is also widely assumed that introspection—examining the causes of our own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors—improves self-awareness. After all, what better way to know ourselves than by reflecting on why we are the way we are?

Yet one of the most surprising findings of our research is that people who introspect are *less* self-aware and report worse job satisfaction and wellbeing. Other research has shown similar patterns.¹⁵

The problem with introspection isn't that it is categorically ineffective—it's that most people are doing it incorrectly. To understand this, let's look at arguably the most common introspective question: "Why?" We ask this when trying to understand our emotions (*Why do I like employee A so much more than employee B?*), or our behavior (*Why did I fly off the handle with that employee?*), or our attitudes (*Why am I so against this deal?*).

As it turns out, "why" is a surprisingly ineffective self-awareness question. Research has shown that we simply do not have access to many of the unconscious thoughts, feelings, and motives we're searching for.¹⁶ And because so much is trapped outside of our conscious awareness, we tend to invent answers that *feel* true but are often wrong.¹⁷ For example, after an uncharacteristic outburst at an employee, a new manager may jump to the conclusion that it happened because she isn't cut out for management, when the real reason was a bad case of low blood sugar.

Consequently, the problem with asking *why* isn't just how wrong we are, but how confident we are that we are right.¹⁸ The human mind rarely operates in a rational fashion, and our judgments are seldom free from bias. We tend to pounce on whatever insights we find without questioning their validity or value, we ignore contradictory evidence, and we force our thoughts to conform to our initial explanations.

Another negative consequence of asking *why*—especially when trying to explain an undesired outcome—is that it invites unproductive negative thoughts.¹⁹ In our research, we’ve found that people who are very introspective are also more likely to get caught in ruminative patterns. For example, if an employee who receives a bad performance review asks *Why did I get such a bad rating?*, they’re likely to land on an explanation focused on their fears, shortcomings, or insecurities, rather than a rational assessment of their strengths and weaknesses. (For this reason, frequent self-analyzers are more depressed and anxious and experience poorer well-being.²⁰)

So if *why* isn’t the right introspective question, is there a better one? My research team scoured hundreds of pages of interview transcripts with highly self-aware people to see if they approached introspection differently. Indeed, there was a clear pattern: Although the word “why” appeared fewer than 150 times, the word “what” appeared more than 1,000 times.

Therefore, to increase productive self-insight and decrease unproductive rumination, we should ask *what*, not *why*.²¹ “What” questions help us stay objective, future-focused, and empowered to act on our new insights.

For example, consider Jose, an entertainment industry veteran we interviewed, who hated his job. Where many

would have gotten stuck thinking “Why do I feel so terrible?” he asked, “What are the situations that make me feel terrible, and what do they have in common?” He realized that he’d never be happy in that career, and it gave him the courage to pursue a new and far more fulfilling one in wealth management.

Similarly, Robin, a customer service leader who was new to her job, needed to understand a piece of negative feedback she’d gotten from an employee. Instead of asking “Why did you say this about me?” Robin inquired, “What are the steps I need to take in the future to do a better job?” This helped them move to solutions rather than focusing on the unproductive patterns of the past.

A final case is Paul, who told us about learning that the business he’d recently purchased was no longer profitable. At first, all he could ask himself was “Why wasn’t I able to turn things around?” But he quickly realized that he didn’t have the time or energy to beat himself up—he had to figure out what to do next. He started asking, “What do I need to do to move forward in a way that minimizes the impact to our customers and employees?” He created a plan and was able to find creative ways to do as much good for others as possible while winding down the business. When all that was over, he challenged himself to articulate what he learned from the experience—his answer both

helped him avoid similar mistakes in the future and helped others learn from them, too.²²

These qualitative findings have been bolstered by others' quantitative research. In one study, psychologists J. Gregory Hixon and William Swann gave a group of undergraduates negative feedback on a test of their "sociability, likability, and interestingness."²³ Some were given time to think about *why* they were the kind of person they were, while others were asked to think about *what* kind of person they were. When the researchers had them evaluate the accuracy of the feedback, the "why" students spent their energy rationalizing and denying what they'd learned, and the "what" students were more open to this new information and how they might learn from it. Hixon and Swann's rather bold conclusion was that "thinking about why one is the way one is may be no better than not thinking about one's self at all."

All of this brings us to conclude: Leaders who focus on building both internal and external self-awareness, who seek honest feedback from loving critics, and who ask *what* instead of *why* can learn to see themselves more clearly—and reap the many rewards that increased self-knowledge delivers. And no matter how much progress we make, there's always more to learn. That's one of the things that makes the journey to self-awareness so exciting.

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Successful Leaders Know What Made Them Who They Are

By Bernie Swain

Can you identify the one person, event, or influence that made you who you are as a leader and a person? Over the past 10 years, I've put that question to 100 of the eminent people I represented as chairman of the Washington Speakers Bureau: Madeleine Albright, Tom Brokaw, Colin Powell, Terry Bradshaw, Condoleezza Rice, and many others. I was curious to find out what they felt were the turning points in their lives—the defining moments and influences from which they draw motivation and inspiration.

Identifying the foundational moments of our success allows us to maximize our potential, uncover our own passions, and become better leaders. In my case, the defining moment in my life was the realization that I was

never going to enjoy working for other people—a recognition that paradoxically came to me right at the moment when I was on the verge of being offered my dream job (which I eventually turned down to become an entrepreneur). The realization helped fuel me even during periods of uncertainty by reinforcing my will to succeed and comforting me that I was on the right trajectory. Everyone has such an event and can usually identify it after some reflection. Among my interviewees, turning points fell into three broad categories.

People

Forty-five of those interviewees identified a person as the single most enduring influence on their lives. For Madeleine Albright, the former U.S. secretary of state, it was her father, a serious man with far-ranging intellect whose career as a Czechoslovak diplomat was short-circuited twice: by the German occupation in World War II and by the Communist takeover after the war. After the family moved to the United States, he became a professor living in cramped faculty housing—quite a step down from an ambassador’s residence—but worked at his job cheerfully and diligently. She says that being secretary of state was challenging, but she never had any trouble staying focused: “I just had to picture my father in his

flooded basement study, working away with his feet up on bricks.”

For Tom Brokaw, who had been student body president and a three-sport athlete in high school, but who then dropped out of college twice, it was a strict and caring political science professor. For legendary basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski, it was his mother, who had only an eighth-grade education. Her homespun advice to always “get on the right bus . . . filled with good people” became the moral cornerstone of “Coach K’s” life and career.

Events

Forty of my one hundred interviewees identified an event—a failure, an injury, a death, or the like—as the turning point in their lives.

What defined former secretary of labor Robert Reich, at first, was his height. “I am 4'11" and have always been short,” said Reich. Starting in kindergarten, he was teased and bullied, and he learned to find someone bigger who could act as a protector. One of those who watched out for him was an older kid named Michael Schwerner. Years later, in 1964, Mickey Schwerner and two other young civil rights workers were brutally murdered in Neshoba County, Mississippi, by the Ku Klux Klan—a crime that shocked the country and horrified Reich, who had just graduated from high school. The event galvanized Reich, setting him on a

lifelong course of public service and commitment to social justice. “Mickey protected me,” said Reich, now a professor at UC Berkeley. “I, in turn, feel a responsibility to protect others.”

For Tony Blair, a rebellious troublemaker in school, it was his father’s stroke, cutting short the elder Blair’s promising political career and evoking in Tony the discipline and diligence that would eventually make him prime minister of Great Britain.

Debbi Fields, founder of Mrs. Fields Cookies, found the drive and passion to succeed as her unpretentious self when a boorish social superior threw a dictionary in her lap because she had misused a word in conversation.

Environments

Fifteen of my interviewees considered environments—such as a place, a time, or an enveloping experience—as the most powerful influence in their lives. For Condoleezza Rice, it was the love of reading and education that was passed down through her family, beginning with her paternal great-grandmother, Julia Head, who learned to read as a slave on an Alabama cotton plantation. Rice’s grandfather, born in 1892 to Julia and her sharecropper husband, was determined to go to college and went on to become a Presbyterian minister. One day he brought home nine leather-bound, gold-embossed books—the works of

Shakespeare, Hugo, and others—which cost \$90, a huge sum at the time.

“My grandfather believed in having books in the home,” Rice told me, “and, more important, he believed in having his children read them.” Rice’s father earned two master’s degrees, and her aunt Theresa got a PhD in Victorian literature. In 1981, when Rice received her PhD in political science, her father gave her the five remaining books from her grandfather’s set. They sit now on her mantelpiece.

For Chris Matthews, it was his stint in the Peace Corps in Swaziland that took him off his path to academia and sent him toward a life of engagement in politics and journalism.

Colin Powell’s enduring influence comes from a neighborhood in the South Bronx called Banana Kelley, where he grew up among caring family members and a multilingual, nurturing community of hardworking people. “I owe whatever success I’ve had to . . . Banana Kelley,” he says.

Successful leaders are self-aware. That’s the overriding lesson I’ve learned from working and talking with some the world’s most accomplished people over the past 36 years. For some, like Powell or Albright, identifying and owning the turning points in their lives comes easily. But for many people, it can be difficult. It took three increasingly painful conversations for Terry Bradshaw to fully get at his: As the

number-one pick in the NFL draft by the Pittsburgh Steelers, he paid little heed to his coaches, goofed off in practice, and exhibited a bravado that masked his deep insecurity as a southern country boy in a big northern city. But as the losses piled up on the field and the boos rained down from the stands, he could no longer sustain his devil-may-care façade. One night he broke down crying in his apartment, prayed, and heard a gentle voice telling him to get real. “I went to practice the next day,” he said to me, “and I set out cultivating a new attitude.” He went on to become one of only three quarterbacks to have won four Super Bowls.

Highly accomplished people have an inner voice and pay attention to it. They understand the defining moments of their lives and thereby better understand their own strengths, biases, and weaknesses as leaders. And that understanding provides them with a deep well of energy and passion that they draw on throughout their lives. We may not all have careers that match the 100 people I interviewed, but we can all share their ability to grasp—and harness—the turning points of our lives and careers.

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Two Ways to Clarify Your Professional Passions

By Robert Steven Kaplan

Have you ever noticed that highly effective people almost always say they love what they do? If you ask them about their good career fortune, they're likely to advise that you have to love what you do in order to perform at a high level of effectiveness. They will talk about the critical importance of having a long-term perspective and real passion in pursuing a career. Numerous studies of highly effective people point to a strong correlation between believing in the mission, enjoying the job, and performing at a high level.

So why is it that people are often skeptical of the notion that passion and career should be integrally linked? Why do people often struggle to discern their passions and then connect those passions to a viable career path? When

people hear the testimony of a seemingly happy and fulfilled person, they often say, “That’s easy for them to say *now*. They’ve made it. It’s not so easy to follow this advice when you’re sitting where I’m sitting!” What they don’t fully realize is that connecting their passions to their work was a big part of how these people eventually made it.

Passion is about excitement. It has more to do with your heart than your head. It’s critical because reaching your full potential requires a combination of your heart *and* your head. In my experience, your intellectual capability and skills will take you only so far.

Regardless of your talent, you will have rough days, months, and years. You may get stuck with a lousy boss. You may get discouraged and feel like giving up. What pulls you through these difficult periods? The answer is *your passion*: It is the essential rocket fuel that helps you overcome difficulties and work through dark times. Passion emanates from a belief in a cause or the enjoyment you feel from performing certain tasks. It helps you hang in there so that you can improve your skills, overcome adversity, and find meaning in your work and in your life.

In talking to more experienced people, I often have to get them to mentally set aside their financial obligations, their role in the community, and the expectations of friends, family, and loved ones. It can be particularly difficult for midcareer professionals to understand their

passions because, in many cases, the breakage cost of changing jobs or careers feels so huge to them that it's not even worth considering. As a result, they try not to think too deeply about whether they like what they're doing.

The problem for many midcareer people is that they're experiencing a plateau that is beginning to alarm them and diminish their career prospects. This plateau is often a by-product of lack of passion for the job. It may be that the nature of the job has changed or the world has changed, and the mission and tasks of their career no longer arouse their passions. In other cases, nothing has changed except the people themselves. They simply want more meaning from their lives and professional careers.

Of course, these questions are never fully resolved. Why? It's because there are many variables in play, and we can't control all of them. The challenge is to be self-aware.

That's difficult, because most of our professional days are chaotic. In fact, life is chaotic, and, sadly, we can't usually predict the future. It feels as if there's no time to reflect. So how are you supposed to get perspective on these questions?

I suggest that you try several exercises. These exercises may help you increase your self-awareness and develop your abilities to better understand your passions. They also encourage you to pay closer attention to and be

more aware of the tasks and subjects you truly find interesting and enjoyable.

Your best self

This exercise involves thinking back to a time when you were at your best. You were great! You did a superb job, and you really enjoyed it. You loved what you were doing while you were doing it, and you received substantial positive reinforcement.

Remember the situation. Write down the details. What were you doing? What tasks were you performing? What were the key elements of the environment, the mission, and the nature of the impact you were making? Did you have a boss, or were you self-directed? Sketch out the complete picture. What did you love about it? What were the factors that made it enjoyable and helped you shine?

If you're like most people, it may take you some time to recall such a situation. It's not that you haven't had these experiences; rather, you have gotten out of the habit of thinking about a time when you were at your best and enjoying what you were doing.

After sketching out the situation, think about what you can learn from this recollection. What are your insights regarding the nature of your enjoyment, the critical environmental factors, the types of tasks you took pleasure in performing, and so on? What does this recollection tell

you about what you might enjoy now? Write down your thoughts.

Mental models

Another approach to helping you think about your desires and passions is to use mental models. That is, assume xyz, and then tell me what you would do—and why. Here are examples of these models:

- If you had one year left to live, how would you spend it? What does that tell you about what you enjoy and what you have a passion for?
- If you had enough money to do whatever you wanted, what job or career would you pursue?
- If you knew you were going to be highly successful in your career, what job would you pursue today?
- What would you like to tell your children and grandchildren about what you accomplished in your career? How will you explain to them what career you chose?
- If you were a third party giving advice to yourself, what would you suggest regarding a career choice?

Although these mental models may seem a bit silly or whimsical, I urge you to take the time to try them, consider

your answers, and write them down. You're likely to be surprised by what you learn. Each of them attempts to help you let go of fears, insecurities, and worries about the opinions of others—and focus on what you truly believe and desire.

Passion is critical in reaching your potential. Getting in touch with your passions may require you to give your fears and insecurities a rest and focus more on your hopes and dreams. You don't need to immediately decide what action to take or assess whether your dream is realistic. There is an element of brainstorming in this effort: You don't want to kill ideas before you've considered them. Again, allow yourself to focus on the *what* before you worry about the *how*. These exercises are about self-awareness, first and foremost. It is uncanny how much more likely you are to recognize opportunities if you're aware of what you're looking for.

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Emotional Agility

By Susan David and Christina Congleton

Sixteen thousand—that’s how many words we speak, on average, each day. So imagine how many unspoken ones course through our minds. Most of them are not facts but evaluations and judgments entwined with emotions—some positive and helpful (*I’ve worked hard and I can ace this presentation; This issue is worth speaking up about; The new VP seems approachable*), others negative and less so (*He’s purposely ignoring me; I’m going to make a fool of myself; I’m a fake*).

The prevailing wisdom says that difficult thoughts and feelings have no place at the office: Executives, and particularly leaders, should be either stoic or cheerful; they must project confidence and damp down any negativity bubbling up inside them. But that goes against basic biology. All healthy human beings have an inner stream of

thoughts and feelings that include criticism, doubt, and fear. That's just our minds doing the job they were designed to do: trying to anticipate and solve problems and avoid potential pitfalls.

In our people-strategy consulting practice advising companies around the world, we see leaders stumble not because they *have* undesirable thoughts and feelings—that's inevitable—but because they get *hooked* by them, like fish caught on a line. This happens in one of two ways. They buy into the thoughts, treating them like facts (*It was the same in my last job . . . I've been a failure my whole career*), and avoid situations that evoke them (*I'm not going to take on that new challenge*). Or, usually at the behest of their supporters, they challenge the existence of the thoughts and try to rationalize them away (*I shouldn't have thoughts like this . . . I know I'm not a total failure*), and perhaps force themselves into similar situations, even when those go against their core values and goals (*Take on that new assignment—you've got to get over this*). In either case, they are paying too much attention to their internal chatter and allowing it to sap important cognitive resources that could be put to better use.

This is a common problem, often perpetuated by popular self-management strategies. We regularly see executives with recurring emotional challenges at work—

anxiety about priorities, jealousy of others' success, fear of rejection, distress over perceived slights—who have devised techniques to “fix” them: positive affirmations, prioritized to-do lists, immersion in certain tasks. But when we ask how long the challenges have persisted, the answer might be 10 years, 20 years, or since childhood.

Clearly, those techniques don't work—in fact, ample research shows that attempting to minimize or ignore thoughts and emotions serves only to amplify them. In a famous study led by the late Daniel Wegner, a Harvard professor, participants who were told to avoid thinking about white bears had trouble doing so; later, when the ban was lifted, they thought about white bears much more than the control group did. Anyone who has dreamed of chocolate cake and french fries while following a strict diet understands this phenomenon.

Effective leaders don't buy into *or* try to suppress their inner experiences. Instead they approach them in a mindful, values-driven, and productive way—developing what we call *emotional agility*. In our complex, fast-changing knowledge economy, this ability to manage one's thoughts and feelings is essential to business success. Numerous studies, from the University of London professor Frank Bond and others, show that emotional agility can help people alleviate stress, reduce errors, become more innovative, and improve job performance.

We've worked with leaders in various industries to build this critical skill, and here we offer four practices—adapted from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), originally developed by the University of Nevada psychologist Steven C. Hayes—that are designed to help you do the same: Recognize your patterns; label your thoughts and emotions; accept them; and act on your values.

Fish on a line

Let's start with two case studies. Cynthia is a senior corporate lawyer with two young children. She used to feel intense guilt about missed opportunities—both at the office, where her peers worked 80 hours a week while she worked 50, and at home, where she was often too distracted or tired to fully engage with her husband and children. One nagging voice in her head told her she'd have to be a better employee or risk career failure; another told her to be a better mother or risk neglecting her family. Cynthia wished that at least one of the voices would shut up. But neither would, and in response she failed to put up her hand for exciting new prospects at the office and compulsively checked messages on her phone during family dinners.

Jeffrey, a rising-star executive at a leading consumer goods company, had a different problem. Intelligent, talented, and ambitious, he was often angry—at bosses who

disregarded his views, subordinates who didn't follow orders, or colleagues who didn't pull their weight. He had lost his temper several times at work and been warned to get it under control. But when he tried, he felt that he was shutting off a core part of his personality, and he became even angrier and more upset.

These smart, successful leaders were hooked by their negative thoughts and emotions. Cynthia was absorbed by guilt; Jeffrey was exploding with anger. Cynthia told the voices to go away; Jeffrey bottled his frustration. Both were trying to avoid the discomfort they felt. They were being controlled by their inner experience, attempting to control it, or switching between the two.

Getting unhooked

Fortunately, both Cynthia and Jeffrey realized that they couldn't go on—at least not successfully and happily—without more-effective inner strategies. We coached them to adopt the four practices:

Recognize your patterns

The first step in developing emotional agility is to notice when you've been hooked by your thoughts and feelings. That's hard to do, but there are certain telltale signs. One is that your thinking becomes rigid and repetitive. For example, Cynthia began to see that her self-recriminations

played like a broken record, repeating the same messages over and over again. Another is that the story your mind is telling seems old, like a rerun of some past experience. Jeffrey noticed that his attitude toward certain colleagues (*He's incompetent; There's no way I'm letting anyone speak to me like that*) was quite familiar. In fact, he had experienced something similar in his previous job—and in the one before that. The source of trouble was not just Jeffrey's environment but his own patterns of thought and feeling. You have to realize that you're stuck before you can initiate change.

Label your thoughts and emotions

When you're hooked, the attention you give your thoughts and feelings crowds your mind; there's no room to examine them. One strategy that may help you consider your situation more objectively is the simple act of labeling. Just as you call a spade a spade, call a thought a thought and an emotion an emotion. *I'm not doing enough at work or at home* becomes *I'm having the thought that I'm not doing enough at work or at home*. Similarly, *My coworker is wrong—he makes me so angry* becomes *I'm having the thought that my coworker is wrong, and I'm feeling anger*. Labeling allows you to see your thoughts and feelings for what they are: transient sources of data that may or may not prove helpful. Humans are psychologically able to take

this helicopter view of private experiences, and mounting scientific evidence shows that simple, straightforward mindfulness practice like this not only improves behavior and well-being but also promotes beneficial biological changes in the brain and at the cellular level. As Cynthia started to slow down and label her thoughts, the criticisms that had once pressed in on her like a dense fog became more like clouds passing through a blue sky.

Accept them

The opposite of control is acceptance: not acting on every thought or resigning yourself to negativity but responding to your ideas and emotions with an open attitude, paying attention to them and letting yourself experience them. Take 10 deep breaths, and notice what's happening in the moment. This can bring relief, but it won't necessarily make you feel good. In fact, you may realize just how upset you really are. The important thing is to show yourself (and others) some compassion and examine the reality of the situation. What's going on—both internally and externally? When Jeffrey acknowledged and made room for his feelings of frustration and anger rather than rejecting them, quashing them, or taking them out on others, he began to notice their energetic quality. They were a signal that something important was at stake and that he needed to take productive action. Instead of yelling at people, he

could make a clear request of a colleague or move swiftly on a pressing issue. The more Jeffrey accepted his anger and brought his curiosity to it, the more it seemed to support rather than undermine his leadership.

Act on your values

When you unhook yourself from your difficult thoughts and emotions, you expand your choices. You can decide to act in a way that aligns with your values. We encourage leaders to focus on the concept of *workability*: Is your response going to serve you and your organization in the long term as well as the short term? Will it help you steer others in a direction that furthers your collective purpose? Are you taking a step toward being the leader you most want to be and living the life you most want to live? The mind's thought stream flows endlessly, and emotions change like the weather, but values can be called on at any time, in any situation.

WHAT ARE YOUR VALUES?

This list is drawn from the Personal Values Card Sort (2001), developed by W. R. Miller, J. C'de Baca, D. B. Matthews, and P. L. Wilbourne, of the University of New Mexico. You can use it to quickly identify the values you hold that might inform a challenging situation at work. When you next make a decision, ask yourself whether it is consistent with these values.

Accuracy

Achievement

Authority

Autonomy

Caring

Challenge

Comfort

Compassion

Contribution

Cooperation

Courtesy

Creativity

Dependability

Duty

Family

Forgiveness

Friendship

Fun

Generosity

Genuineness

Growth

Health

Helpfulness

Honesty

Humility

Humor

Justice

Knowledge

Leisure

Mastery

Moderation

Nonconformity

Openness

Order

Passion

Popularity

Power

Purpose

Rationality

Realism

Responsibility

Risk

Safety

Self-knowledge

Service

Simplicity

Stability

Tolerance

Tradition

Wealth

When Cynthia considered her values, she recognized how deeply committed she was to both her family and her work. She loved being with her children, but she also cared passionately about the pursuit of justice. Unhooked from her distracting and discouraging feelings of guilt, she resolved to be guided by her principles. She recognized how important it was to get home for dinner with her family every evening and to resist work interruptions during that time. But she also undertook to make a number of important business trips, some of which coincided with school events that she would have preferred to attend. Confident that her values—not solely her emotions—were guiding her, Cynthia finally found peace and fulfillment.

It's impossible to block out difficult thoughts and emotions. Effective leaders are mindful of their inner experiences but not caught in them. They know how to free up their internal resources and commit to actions that align with their values. Developing emotional agility is no quick fix. Even those who, like Cynthia and Jeffrey, regularly practice the steps we've outlined here will often find themselves hooked. But over time, leaders who become increasingly adept at it are the ones most likely to thrive.

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Why You Should Make Time for Self-Reflection (Even if You Hate Doing It)

By Jennifer Porter

When people find out I'm an executive coach, they often ask who my toughest clients are. Inexperienced leaders? Senior leaders who think they know everything? Leaders who bully and belittle others? Leaders who shirk responsibility?

The answer is none of the above. The hardest leaders to coach are those who won't reflect—particularly leaders who won't reflect on *themselves*.

At its simplest, reflection is about careful thought. But the kind of reflection that is really valuable to leaders is more nuanced than that. The most useful reflection involves the conscious consideration and analysis of beliefs and actions for the purpose of learning. Reflection gives the brain an opportunity to pause amid the chaos, untangle and

sort through observations and experiences, consider multiple possible interpretations, and create meaning. This meaning becomes learning, which can then inform future mind-sets and actions. For leaders, this “meaning making” is crucial to their ongoing growth and development.

Research by Giada Di Stefano, Francesca Gino, Gary Pisano, and Bradley Staats in call centers demonstrated that employees who spent 15 minutes at the end of the day reflecting about lessons learned performed 23% better after 10 days than those who did not reflect.¹ A study of U.K. commuters found a similar result when those who were prompted to use their commute to think about and plan for their day were happier, more productive, and less burned-out than people who didn't.²

So, if reflection is so helpful, why don't many leaders do it? Leaders often:

- *Don't understand the process.* Many leaders don't know how to reflect. One executive I work with, Ken, shared recently that he had yet again not met his commitment to spend an hour on Sunday mornings reflecting. To help him get over this barrier, I suggested he take the next 30 minutes of our two-hour session and just quietly reflect and then we'd debrief it. After five minutes of silence, he said, “I guess I don't really know

what you want me to do. Maybe that's why I haven't been doing it."

- *Don't like the process.* Reflection requires leaders to do a number of things they typically don't like to do: slow down, adopt a mind-set of not knowing and curiosity, tolerate messiness and inefficiency, and take personal responsibility. The process can lead to valuable insights and even breakthroughs—and it can also lead to feelings of discomfort, vulnerability, defensiveness, and irritation.
- *Don't like the results.* When a leader takes time to reflect, she typically sees ways she was effective as well as things she could have done better. Most leaders quickly dismiss the noted strengths and dislike the noted weaknesses. Some become so defensive in the process that they don't learn anything, so the results are not helpful.
- *Have a bias toward action.* Like soccer goalies, many leaders have a bias toward action. A study of professional soccer goalies defending penalty kicks found that goalies who stay in the center of the goal, instead of lunging left or right, have a 33% chance of stopping the goal, and yet these goalies only stay in the center 6% of the time. The goalies just feel better when they "do something." The same is true of many leaders.

Reflection can feel like staying in the center of the goal and missing the action.

- *Can't see a good ROI.* From early roles, leaders are taught to invest where they can generate a positive ROI—results that indicate the contribution of time, talent, or money paid off. Sometimes it's hard to see an immediate ROI on reflection, particularly when compared with other uses of a leader's time.

If you have found yourself making these same excuses, you can become more reflective by practicing a few simple steps.

- *Identify some important questions.* But don't answer them yet. Here are some possibilities:
 - What are you avoiding?
 - How are you helping your colleagues achieve their goals?
 - How are you *not* helping or even hindering their progress?
 - How might you be contributing to your least enjoyable relationship at work?
 - How could you have been more effective in a recent meeting?

- *Select a reflection process that matches your preferences.* Many people reflect by writing in a journal. If that sounds terrible but talking with a colleague sounds better consider that. As long as you're reflecting and not just chatting about the latest sporting event or complaining about a colleague, your approach is up to you. You can sit, walk, bike, or stand, alone or with a partner, writing, talking, or thinking.
- *Schedule time.* Most leaders are driven by their calendars. So, schedule your reflection time and then commit to keep it. And if you find yourself trying to skip it or avoid it, reflect on that!
- *Start small.* If an hour of reflection seems like too much, try 10 minutes. Teresa Amabile and her colleagues found that the most significant driver of positive emotions and motivation at work was making progress on the tasks at hand. Set yourself up to make progress, even if it feels small.³
- *Do it.* Go back to your list of questions and explore them. Be still. Think. Consider multiple perspectives. Look at the opposite of what you initially believe. Brainstorm. You don't have to like or agree with all of your thoughts—just think and examine your thinking.
- *Ask for help.* For most leaders, a lack of desire, time, experience, or skill can get in the way of reflection.

Consider working with a colleague, therapist, or coach to help you make the time, listen carefully, be a thought partner, and hold you accountable.

Despite the challenges to reflection, the impact is clear. As Peter Drucker said: “Follow effective action with quiet reflection. From the quiet reflection will come even more effective action.”

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Notes

1. Giada Di Stefano, Francesca Gino, Gary P. Pisano, and Bradley R. Staats, “Making Experience Count: The Role of Reflection in Individual Learning,” working paper 14-093, Harvard Business School, 2014.
2. Jon M. Jachimowicz et al., “Commuting as Role Transitions: How Trait Self-Control and Work-Related Prospection Offset Negative Effects of Lengthy Commutes,” working paper 16-077, Harvard Business School, 2016.

3. Teresa Amabile and Steven J. Kramer, “The Power of Small Wins,” *Harvard Business Review*, May 2011.

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You, By the Numbers

By H. James Wilson

A few years ago entrepreneur and scientist Stephen Wolfram wrote a blog post titled “The Personal Analytics of My Life.”¹ In it, he mapped data about his email usage, time spent in meetings, even the number of keystrokes he’s logged—for 22 years. The resulting charts and graphs are mesmerizing, and somewhat instructive. Wolfram has documented that he’s a man of routine who likes to work alone late at night. He knows that although his scheduled telephone calls usually start on time, his in-person meetings are less predictable—and that he’s hitting the backspace key 7% of the time he’s on the keyboard.

This “effort at self-awareness,” as Wolfram described it, makes him a trailblazer in the growing discipline of *auto-analytics*—the practice of voluntarily collecting and analyzing data about oneself in order to improve. Athletes

have long used visual and advanced statistical analysis to ratchet up their performance. Now auto-analytics is flourishing in the workplace, too. With wearables, mobile devices and apps, sophisticated data visualization, and AI, it has become fairly easy to monitor our office activity—and any factors that might affect it—and to use that information to make better choices about where to focus our time and energy.

This heralds an important shift in how we think about tracking work performance and even career planning. Employees have long been measured, but managers have traditionally chosen the tools and the metrics—and, more important, decided how to interpret the findings. With auto-analytics, individuals take control. They can run autonomous experiments to pinpoint which tasks and techniques make them most productive and satisfied—and then implement changes accordingly.

Wolfram's insight was that his “shockingly regular” routine liberated him to be “energetic—and spontaneous—about intellectual and other things.” But he did not use the data to discover ways to improve his performance, and in that way his blog post is as much cautionary as it is pioneering, for it highlights the pitfalls of embracing auto-analytics without first adopting a plan. Lacking a clear goal at the outset, Wolfram took two decades to synthesize his vast collection of data. Even then he stopped at observation

rather than progressing to analysis and intervention. What improvements could he have made on the basis of his findings? Would it have been more useful to map, say, project time lines against stress levels—or, given that he runs his company remotely, moods against time spent with others?

If these kinds of questions are not tackled up front, auto-analytics runs the risk of becoming a promising concept that's poorly applied and then dismissed as just another tech fad. To do it right, you need to understand the tools and develop an approach. The aim is not merely to increase self-awareness but to become better at your job and more satisfied with your life.

The tools

There are two broad types of auto-analytics tools. The first are *trackers*, which reveal patterns and help you set goals. They allow you to document routines and physical responses such as sleep hours, heart rate, and food consumed or calories burned—information you can use to learn, for example, how your caffeine and sugar consumption affects your work output or which office interactions spike your blood pressure. Trackers are best used longitudinally (over days, weeks, or longer) and iteratively, to test interventions and their results until the

right balance is struck. You gather a baseline of personal data and then run cycles of data collection and analysis.

That analysis readies you for the second type of tools, *nudgers*, which guide you toward your goals by asking questions or prompting action on the basis of the data they've received. Nudgers are often apps or online tools that might tell you to work out, to stop drinking coffee, or to slow down during a presentation. They usually require some up-front investment to make the algorithms "know" how and when to ping you.

The analysis

What exactly can you measure? Using successful cases and research, I have developed a framework that includes three arenas where auto-analytics can be useful: the physical self, the thinking self, and the emotional self (body, mind, and spirit).

The physical self

Your physical condition affects your work. We've known this roughly since the Industrial Revolution, when Frederick Taylor's famous time and motion studies showed that an iron-plant worker's movements, such as shoveling pig iron into a cart, could be measured and improved. Likewise, the sleep patterns, stress levels, and exercise regimens of knowledge workers have been shown to affect

productivity, creativity, and overall job performance. Today these workers can choose from a variety of mobile apps, wearable sensors, or desktop tools that autonomously collect rich data about their bodies' movements and physiological systems.

Business consultant Sacha Chua wanted to understand the relationship between her sleep schedule and achieving her professional priorities, so she has tested several tools for this purpose. Using a sleep-tracking app, she monitored her bedtimes, wake-up times, amount of sleep per night, and sleep quality over several weeks. (See the sidebar [“Self-Measurement at a Glance.”](#)) With this baseline and a hypothesis that she was sleeping later than she should, she then tried waking up earlier—at 5:40 rather than 8:30 a.m.

SELF-MEASUREMENT AT A GLANCE

Tools in the field of auto-analytics often employ behavior-based algorithms to make recommendations to users. The analyzed data may be collected by wearable devices with sensors and visualized on mobile devices or computers. Most tools focus on one of three personal domains.

The physical self

Tools that measure and monitor physical movements and body functions help you make better decisions about professional effectiveness and well-being. Sleep trackers may gather data on sleep quantity and quality,

enabling you to understand why you feel alert (or lethargic) on certain workdays and how to optimize the relationship between rest and performance. Movement or fitness trackers may count the number of steps you've taken or nudge you to get up when you've been sitting still for too long.

The thinking self

Tools focused on the thinking self gather data related to the routines, habits, and productivity of knowledge work. Browser-based attention trackers visualize patterns that reflect where and how much your attention flows across categories while on the web during a workday.

The emotional self

Tools that measure emotions increase users' awareness of how professional decisions, situations, and actions correlate with mood. A mood-tracking app may prompt you with occasional simple questions to track your state of mind over time. Then it can make recommendations, derived from clinical practice insights and research data, about how you can improve job performance and satisfaction.

Chua discovered, to her surprise, that she was getting *more* and better sleep with the new wake-up time, which improved her engagement and performance at work. It seemed to be forcing her to eschew unimportant late-night activities, such as browsing the web, so that she could go to

bed earlier. Instead of squandering much of her morning in low-quality sleep while hitting the snooze button over and over, she could spend the time writing and programming. This exercise was nominally about sleep, but the data provided a more rigorous way for Chua to explore, prioritize, and act on what really mattered to her personally and professionally.

The thinking self

In the 1960s Peter Drucker legitimized quantifying the thinking self into units of knowledge work. Although knowledge work has remained notoriously tough to measure rigorously or directly while it is being performed, its output is still tracked with approximations like billable hours, reports filed, or lines of code written. Such measures can inform managers and financial systems, but they do little to guide individuals who want to learn how to get better at their jobs. Auto-analytics can help by gathering data as you perform cognitive tasks, such as client research on your smartphone or statistical analysis in Excel.

Google engineer Bob Evans used both trackers and nudgers to investigate the relationship between his attention and his productivity. He explains, “As engineers, we load up our heads with all these variables, the

intellectual pieces of the systems we are building. If we get distracted, we lose that thread in our heads.”

With a tool that interacts with online calendars, Evans analyzed how frequently he was shifting between solitary thinking and collegial interaction across his days and weeks—and then mapped that against his work output. The data showed him that he needs about four straight hours to get anything ambitious done, so he’s now focusing on his most challenging tasks when he has that kind of time, not during days when lots of meetings disrupt his mental flow.

Evans also uses a mobile app that randomly pings him three times a day, asking, “Have you been working in the past two hours?” If he hasn’t, he’s prodded to refocus. If he clicks yes, the app asks more questions: “What was your primary work activity?” and “What was your secondary work activity?” This data-gathering approach, developed by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, is called the experience sampling method, or ESM. Just over a week into Evans’s three-week experiment, the ESM data began to show that he was responding to work emails too frequently, which distracted him from more important tasks. So he began to answer email just twice a day to see whether that increased his productivity. It did. In the third week, every time the app pinged him, he was in the midst of his core programming work. (Notably, one of Evans’s colleagues set

the app to check in with him *eight* times a day. He grew so frustrated that he abandoned the experiment.)

The emotional self

Daniel Goleman famously asserted that nearly 90% of the difference between outstanding and average leaders is attributable to emotional factors, not intellectual acumen. Indeed, many professionals are intrigued by the role emotions play in their careers, and they aspire to become more aware of their own emotional states and their ability to manage them. Yet assessment tools and coaches focusing on emotional intelligence are expensive, intrusive, and often reserved for select members of the C-suite.

Auto-analytics tools don't measure emotional intelligence per se, but they provide an easier way to gain insight into emotions and use data to enhance our predictions of what will make us happy in our daily work and careers. Many apps and tools track moods by prompting the user: "How do you feel right now?" If you use one on a GPS-enabled mobile phone, you can discover correlations between your emotions and your location. Are you happiest working at home, at Starbucks, or at the office? Are you less happy at certain client sites or when you travel? Or, using a tool that crunches textual data—such as the types of words in your email communications or

journal entries—you can quantify feelings about a particular assignment or job opportunity.

These tools are no substitute for personal reflection, but they can facilitate the process. A case in point is that of Marie Dupuch, a branding strategist who had long envied people who “could recognize their mood and know exactly what put them in it.” Realizing she wasn’t that intuitive, she instead tried a quantitative approach to understanding her emotions.

With college graduation looming, and the pressure to “reflect and figure things out” before entering the job market, she began tracking her moods. During her three-month final semester, she used a beta version of a tracker app that asked her to rate her mood on a five-point scale three times a day. At first, the findings were predictable: Talking to friends and family on Skype enhanced her mood; riding on public transportation depressed it. But one data point stood out: Thursdays were her happiest days, which surprised her given that they were also her busiest.

On Thursdays Dupuch drove from her college campus to the city for a course on advertising that featured guest lecturers and required interaction with advertising executives and other creative types. She hypothesized that it was the exposure to the advertising world in an urban location that made her hardest day her happiest. So she decided to test her theory: She scheduled six informational

interviews over five days with ad agencies in Manhattan and measured her mood the whole time. She reflects, “Through this test I was able to see with real data that advertising was a good bet, that this was the kind of career that would make me happy.” Today she is working happily and productively in the advertising industry in New York.

Of course, effectively tracking your emotions presupposes that you can take an analytical—even a clinical—view of your mood when data are being gathered. That’s quite different from tracking hours of sleep or number of emails sent. Dupuch is among many I’ve spoken to who say that the process is unnatural at first but that it gets easier with practice and eventually improves your ability to sense and react to how you’re feeling.

The future

It’s still early days for auto-analytics. Nevertheless, important new streams of research, based in cognitive and behavioral science, are currently being conducted at universities and by private enterprises. A project called Quantified Self is hosting opportunities for individuals to try out auto-analytics tools and experimental methods. In addition, new field-based insights on data visualization and algorithm innovation from the field of business analytics have direct application for auto-analytics practitioners and toolmakers.

Two other trends are also emerging. First, the tools will become more sophisticated. Some will be smarter, with machine-learning algorithms that make the nudging function more nuanced so that, for example, the technology knows better when and how to ping you. They may also allow for more accuracy, gathering more types of data related to diet and physical activity at a faster rate. Some tools will become less visible—woven into clothing to capture physical data, for instance, or embedded in professional tools such as spreadsheets and word processing apps. Second, a more holistic approach to auto-analytics will develop. Applications will consolidate many kinds of measurements in a single dashboard and allow us to analyze ourselves across ever more complex dimensions.

Some tools already combine tracking and nudging—and can add a social dimension. They ask you to create a goal, such as increasing your number of sales calls or conversations with direct reports each week, and then use digital displays to help you analyze your daily progress toward achieving it. To increase your motivation, they use nudges or even levy small financial penalties when you veer off track. And they can be used socially so that people—even strangers—working toward the same goal can share data and encourage one another, as people do in a weight-loss club.

Tech entrepreneur Nick Winter has used this methodology to great success. When he felt he was on a productivity plateau and sensed that his new business was in jeopardy, he began gathering data on his work activities and output. Over a 10-month period, Winter tested four distinct approaches to being more productive, from spreadsheet tracking to nudger tools. He settled on an auto-analytics technique called “percentile feedback graphing” to help him see trends clearly. He has now assembled an online group of like-minded colleagues who compare—and compete on—their metrics.

Another example of data consolidation is Personal Analytics Companion (PACO), an open-source mobile app designed by Google’s Bob Evans, whose story appeared earlier. “Instead of having all these vertical apps, from mood trackers to meeting trackers, this is one place where you . . . can mash all your data together and compare,” Evans says. “You can see trends, distributions, relationships.”

Imagine the auto-analytics app that helps a manager reschedule his innovation session because it knows he didn’t sleep well, his extra-long commute created stress, and he has a dull budget meeting right before the session. Or consider the knowledge worker who arms herself before a performance review with personal benchmark data that will support or counter her manager’s assessment.

That's where auto-analytics is heading. When analysis reveals higher performance on noncore tasks, auto-analytics can even become the impetus for a full-on career switch. Think of how much less anxiety that life-altering decision would cause if you had data to support it.

Applied the right way, auto-analytics can provide hard evidence in situations where traditionally we've relied on intuition and anecdotal feedback. Quantifying yourself is a revelatory experience—and perhaps the best thing you can do to improve your career and your life.

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Note

1. Stephen Wolfram, "The Personal Analytics of My Life" (blog post), March 8, 2012, <http://blog.stephenwolfram.com/2012/03/the-personal-analytics-of-my-life/>.

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How Are You Perceived at Work? Here's an Exercise to Find Out

By Kristi Hedges

It's not easy to understand how other people perceive us. We are often uncertain, confused, or even completely unaware of what we project. And this lack of self-awareness can be career-limiting.

Consider a former client of mine who was angling for the C-suite but had received feedback that his colleagues considered him negative and difficult. He was stunned; he thought of himself as analytical and thorough and assumed everyone understood that he pushed back in order to get to the best answer. He was also unaware that he had a habit of grimacing while processing information, which looked to others like annoyance.

My client was suffering from what psychologists call the *transparency illusion*—the belief that we're all open

books and that what we intend is what people see. But there can be a wide gap between intent and impact. People are often unaware of their facial expressions, especially when deep in thought. (As a colleague of mine says, “Thinking faces aren’t pretty.”) And particular emotions can be confusing to interpret. Frustration and slight discomfort, for example, can easily be mistaken for each another.

Knowing that most of us don’t clearly project what we intend doesn’t stop us from confidently forming impressions based on the *impact* we feel. And in organizations, these impressions are often crowdsourced (a kind of offline Yelp for people) and a common narrative can emerge. These narratives get shared as advice (*Just started reporting to Ana? Here’s the best way to work with her*) or spread as malicious gossip (*Claude’s jockeying for power again*).

Tapping into this collective impression can give us valuable information on what’s working for us and where we may need to adjust our style. Even if we get frequent feedback at work, it’s typically about our functional performance. You may be told that your sales skills need sharpening, but not that people see you as self-interested. Which one has more of an impact on your career?

In *The Power of Presence*, I outline a straightforward presence audit to determine how others perceive you. It

only takes a couple well-worded questions to a few key people to get the information you need. (If you've ever conducted a 360-degree evaluation, you've seen how quickly impressions start repeating.)

While this exercise won't take a lot of time, it may be psychologically intensive. So keep in mind that there's never a comfortable time to do this and assume now is the exact right time.

Use this process as a guide:

- *Select five people.* Choose colleagues who see you repeatedly in relevant work situations: bosses, executives, direct reports, peers, or even former colleagues. Influential coworkers who have their ears to the ground make great sources. If they know you in more than one aspect of your work or life, even better. While it's important that you have trusted people in your group, make sure to choose people who will tell it to you straight.
- *Ask for a face-to-face meeting.* Be clear that you'll keep whatever the person tells you confidential, which will encourage honesty, and that you'll be collecting feedback from several people to find themes, which lessens the burden for any one individual. Make the request in person if you can. People are more likely to consent to participate if they can see you. A phone call

can work too if you can't be physically in front of someone. If you have to make the request via email, offer to answer any questions ahead of the meeting.

- *Ask two questions.* In the meeting, ask these two simple questions designed to tap into the collective wisdom:

1. *What's the general perception of me?*

2. *What could I do differently that would have the greatest impact on my success?*

Depending on the person, you'll hear responses ranging from eye-opening and helpful to vague and confusing. If the person is uncomfortable, they may rely on job- or project-specific feedback. In that case, clarify:

I appreciate that feedback. May I go up a level now and ask about the general perception of me as a leader/colleague/person?

- *Manage your reaction.* Resist the temptation to explain yourself, defend your actions, or reveal disappointment. Your interviewees will be looking to see what effect their feedback has on you in real time. The quality of your feedback will only be as good as your ability to remain comfortable while receiving it. Ask for details or examples if you need them. And end with a sincere thank-you.

When you've finished the interviews, look for themes and repetitive points (it's OK to shed outliers as long as you're sure they don't contain valuable information). If the perceptions of you are in line with what you intend, great. If not, it's time to change your behaviors and begin to shift perception.

Many times clients have come back to me after completing this exercise and said, "Why didn't anyone tell me this before? I can easily change that!"

This is precisely what happened with my client who was perceived as negative and difficult. After realizing that he was being misinterpreted, he made a commitment to state his intentions up front to foster transparency. He adjusted his style in meetings to ask open-ended questions to make clear he was interested in understanding the other person's position. And he worked hard to control his tendency to grimace and keep a neutral facial expression that connoted openness. Gradually he was able to change perceptions, and allow people to know the empathetic and caring person that he knew himself to be.

The transparency illusion is a common trap for managers at all levels. Fortunately, it's possible to close the gap between how people perceive you and how you want to be perceived. Gather reliable information and then make a commitment to change.

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How to Solicit Negative Feedback When Your Manager Doesn't Want to Give It

By Deborah Grayson Riegel

In my role as a leadership coach, I consistently hear my clients say that they crave negative feedback from their managers in order to improve in their jobs, grow their careers, and achieve better business results. However, when it comes to soliciting negative feedback, they find that their managers would rather dismiss, deny, or delay it rather than speak directly, truthfully, and immediately about what isn't working and what needs to change.

That makes sense when you consider what may be at risk when giving (and receiving) negative feedback. In her article, "How to Give Negative Feedback When Your Organization Is 'Nice,'" my colleague Jennifer Porter cites barriers to giving negative feedback that include hurt feelings; a desire to maintain professionalism (rather than

having things get “messy”); a lack of role models for giving negative feedback; the prospect of an emotional outburst; and not wanting to jeopardize the “nice” culture.¹

Additional research from University of California professors Naomi Eisenberger and Matthew Lieberman, and Purdue University professor Kipling D. Williams, shows that negative feedback can be experienced as a form of social rejection (“You’re telling me I’m not good enough and that I don’t belong here” is one frequent interpretation), and that social rejection hurts emotionally *and* physically.² Few managers want to cause their direct reports pain and potentially risk an emotional outburst, loss of commitment, or even retaliation.

Nevertheless, when people don’t receive useful negative feedback, they can’t grow. According to authors Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman in their article, “Your Employees Want the Negative Feedback You Hate to Give,” when asked what was most helpful in their careers, 72% of respondents attributed performance improvement to getting negative feedback from their managers.³ The same study also showed that managers were reluctant to give negative feedback.

Bill Gates agrees: “We all need people who will give us feedback. That’s how we improve.”⁴

So what do you do if you know that negative feedback is what you need to succeed—and nobody’s talking? Stop

asking for negative feedback (you've already tried that, right?) and try one of these creative approaches instead:

- *Give yourself negative feedback first.* According to Wharton professor and author Adam Grant, "When people shy away from giving constructive feedback, it's often because they're afraid of hurting your feelings. But if they hear you talk about what you did wrong, the fear melts away." Start by saying something like, "I know that I tend to work quickly and sometimes overlook important details. I'd like to get better at that. Do you have any thoughts on how I could improve?" And then, once you have them talking, you can ask, "And is there anything else I could be working to improve right now?"⁵
- *Make self-improvement a personal commitment—and ask for help.* If directly soliciting negative feedback isn't working, tell your manager that you've made a commitment to yourself to improve in three areas this year, and that you'd like her feedback on what one or more of those should be. Ask, "Would you please help me keep the commitment I've made to myself?" That way, she can view her feedback as more about helping you make good on a promise and less about hurting your feelings.

- *Reframe negative feedback as a learning opportunity.* If your manager, colleague, or client is reticent to offer negative feedback directly, ask, “What is something you think I could learn from you?” It gives the other person a chance to reflect on their own talents and skills (which makes most people feel good), and share their thinking about where they could help you grow—in a nonthreatening context. (If you’re really lucky, they might even ask you, “And what is something you think I could learn from you?” and then you get to give some gentle negative feedback, too.)
- *Preemptively minimize the impact of the negative feedback.* When people are willing to give negative feedback, they often couch it as “just one little thing—it’s not a big deal” to minimize the impact. You can do that yourself by asking, “If I could change just one small habit, what should it be?” That signals to the other person that they don’t have to minimize, apologize, or put negative feedback in context to make it palatable for you—you’ve done it already.

Managers should be able to give negative feedback, but even if they don’t, you need to learn how to solicit it so that you get the information you need to grow in your job and career.

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Find the Coaching in Criticism

By Sheila Heen and Douglas Stone

Feedback is crucial. That's obvious: It improves performance, develops talent, aligns expectations, solves problems, guides promotion and pay, and boosts the bottom line.

But it's equally obvious that in many organizations, feedback doesn't work. A glance at the stats tells the story: Only 36% of managers complete appraisals thoroughly and on time. In one recent survey, 55% of employees said their most recent performance review had been unfair or inaccurate, and one in four said they dread such evaluations more than anything else in their working lives. When senior HR executives were asked about their biggest performance management challenge, 63% cited managers' inability or unwillingness to have difficult feedback discussions. Coaching and mentoring? Uneven at best.

Most companies try to address these problems by training leaders to give feedback more effectively and more often. That's fine as far as it goes; everyone benefits when managers are better communicators. But improving the skills of the feedback giver won't accomplish much if the receiver isn't able to absorb what is said. It is the receiver who controls whether feedback is let in or kept out, who has to make sense of what he or she is hearing, and who decides whether or not to change. People need to stop treating feedback only as something that must be pushed and instead improve their ability to pull.

For the past 20 years we've coached executives on difficult conversations, and we've found that almost everyone, from new hires to C-suite veterans, struggles with receiving feedback. A critical performance review, a well-intended suggestion, or an oblique comment that may or may not even be feedback ("Well, your presentation was certainly interesting") can spark an emotional reaction, inject tension into the relationship, and bring communication to a halt. But there's good news, too: The skills needed to receive feedback well are distinct and learnable. They include being able to identify and manage the emotions triggered by the feedback and extract value from criticism even when it's poorly delivered.

Why feedback doesn't register

What makes receiving feedback so hard? The process strikes at the tension between two core human needs—the need to learn and grow, and the need to be accepted just the way you are. As a result, even a seemingly benign suggestion can leave you feeling angry, anxious, badly treated, or profoundly threatened. A hedge such as “Don’t take this personally” does nothing to soften the blow.

Getting better at receiving feedback starts with understanding and managing those feelings. You might think there are a thousand ways in which feedback can push your buttons, but in fact there are only three.

Truth triggers are set off by the content of the feedback. When assessments or advice seem off base, unhelpful, or simply untrue, you feel indignant, wronged, and exasperated.

Relationship triggers are tripped by the person providing the feedback. Exchanges are often colored by what you believe about the giver (He’s got no credibility on this topic!) and how you feel about your previous interactions (After all I’ve done for you, I get this petty criticism?). So you might reject coaching that you would accept on its merits if it came from someone else.

Identity triggers are all about your relationship with yourself. Whether the feedback is right or wrong, wise or witless, it can be devastating if it causes your sense of who

you are to come undone. In such moments you'll struggle with feeling overwhelmed, defensive, or off balance.

All these responses are natural and reasonable; in some cases they are unavoidable. The solution isn't to pretend you don't have them. It's to recognize what's happening and learn how to derive benefit from feedback even when it sets off one or more of your triggers.

Six steps to becoming a better receiver

Taking feedback well is a process of sorting and filtering. You need to understand the other person's point of view, try on ideas that may at first seem a poor fit, and experiment with different ways of doing things. You also need to discard or shelve critiques that are genuinely misdirected or are not helpful right away. But it's nearly impossible to do any of those things from inside a triggered response. Instead of ushering you into a nuanced conversation that will help you learn, your triggers prime you to reject, counterattack, or withdraw.

The six steps below will keep you from throwing valuable feedback onto the discard pile or—just as damaging—accepting and acting on comments that you would be better off disregarding. They are presented as advice to the receiver. But, of course, understanding the challenges of receiving feedback helps the giver be more effective, too.

1. Know your tendencies

You've been getting feedback all your life, so there are no doubt patterns in how you respond. Do you defend yourself on the facts ("This is plain wrong"), argue about the method of delivery ("You're really doing this by email?"), or strike back ("You, of all people?")? Do you smile on the outside but seethe on the inside? Do you get teary or filled with righteous indignation? And what role does the passage of time play? Do you tend to reject feedback in the moment and then step back and consider it over time? Do you accept it all immediately but later decide it's not valid? Do you agree with it intellectually but have trouble changing your behavior?

When Michael, an advertising executive, hears his boss make an offhand joke about his lack of professionalism, it hits him like a sledgehammer. "I'm flooded with shame," he told us, "and all my failings rush to mind, as if I'm Googling 'things wrong with me' and getting 1.2 million hits, with sponsored ads from my father and my ex. In this state it's hard to see the feedback at 'actual size.'" But now that Michael understands his standard operating procedure, he's able to make better choices about where to go from there: "I can reassure myself that I'm exaggerating, and usually after I sleep on it, I'm in a better place to figure out whether there's something I can learn."

2. Disentangle the “what” from the “who”

If the feedback is on target and the advice is wise, it shouldn't matter who delivers it. But it does. When a relationship trigger is activated, entwining the content of comments with your feelings about the giver (or about how, when, or where she delivered the comments), learning is short-circuited. To keep that from happening, you have to work to separate the message from the messenger, and then consider both.

Janet, a chemist and a team leader at a pharmaceutical company, received glowing comments from her peers and superiors during her 360-degree review but was surprised by the negative feedback she got from her direct reports. She immediately concluded that the problem was theirs: “I have high standards, and some of them can't handle that,” she remembers thinking. “They aren't used to someone holding their feet to the fire.” In this way, she changed the subject from her management style to her subordinates' competence, preventing her from learning something important about the impact she had on others.

Eventually the penny dropped, Janet says. “I came to see that whether it was their performance problem or my leadership problem, those were not mutually exclusive issues, and both were worth solving.” She was able to disentangle the issues and talk to her team about both. Wisely, she began the conversation with their feedback to

her, asking, “What am I doing that’s making things tough? What would improve the situation?”

3. Sort toward coaching

Some feedback is evaluative (“Your rating is a 4”); some is coaching (“Here’s how you can improve”). Everyone needs both. Evaluations tell you where you stand, what to expect, and what is expected of you. Coaching allows you to learn and improve and helps you play at a higher level.

It’s not always easy to distinguish one from the other. When a board member phoned James to suggest that he start the next quarter’s CFO presentation with analyst predictions rather than internal projections, was that intended as a helpful suggestion, or was it a veiled criticism of his usual approach? When in doubt, people tend to assume the worst and to put even well-intentioned coaching into the evaluation bin. Feeling judged is likely to set off your identity triggers, and the resulting anxiety can drown out the opportunity to learn. So whenever possible, sort toward coaching. Work to hear feedback as potentially valuable advice from a fresh perspective rather than as an indictment of how you’ve done things in the past. When James took that approach, “the suggestion became less emotionally loaded,” he says. “I decided to hear it as simply an indication of how that board member might more easily digest quarterly information.”

4. Unpack the feedback

Often it's not immediately clear whether feedback is valid and useful. So before you accept or reject it, do some analysis to better understand it.

Here's a hypothetical example. Kara, who's in sales, is told by Johann, an experienced colleague, that she needs to "be more assertive." Her reaction might be to reject his advice ("I think I'm pretty assertive already"). Or she might acquiesce ("I really do need to step it up"). But before she decides what to do, she needs to understand what he really means. Does he think she should speak up more often, or just with greater conviction? Should she smile more or less? Have the confidence to admit she doesn't know something or the confidence to pretend she does?

Even the simple advice to "be more assertive" comes from a complex set of observations and judgments that Johann has made while watching Kara in meetings and with customers. Kara needs to dig into the general suggestion and find out what in particular prompted it. What did Johann see her do or fail to do? What did he expect, and what is he worried about? In other words, where is the feedback coming from?

Kara also needs to know where the feedback is going—exactly what Johann wants her to do differently and why. After a clarifying discussion, she might agree that she is less assertive than others on the sales floor but disagree

with the idea that she should change. If all her sales heroes are quiet, humble, and deeply curious about customers' needs, Kara's view of what it means to be good at sales might look and sound very different from Johann's *Glengarry Glen Ross* ideal.

When you set aside snap judgments and take time to explore where feedback is coming from and where it's going, you can enter into a rich, informative conversation about perceived best practices—whether you decide to take the advice or not.

5. Ask for just one thing

Feedback is less likely to set off your emotional triggers if you request it and direct it. So don't wait until your annual performance review. Find opportunities to get bite-size pieces of coaching from a variety of people throughout the year. Don't invite criticism with a big, unfocused question like "Do you have any feedback for me?" Make the process more manageable by asking a colleague, a boss, or a direct report, "What's one thing you see me doing (or failing to do) that holds me back?" That person may name the first behavior that comes to mind or the most important one on his or her list. Either way, you'll get concrete information and can tease out more specifics at your own pace.

Roberto, a fund manager at a financial services firm, found his 360-degree review process overwhelming and

confusing. “Eighteen pages of charts and graphs and no ability to have follow-up conversations to clarify the feedback was frustrating,” he says, adding that it also left him feeling awkward around his colleagues.

Now Roberto taps two or three people each quarter to ask for one thing he might work on. “They don’t offer the same things, but over time I hear themes, and that gives me a good sense of where my growth edge lies,” he says. “And I have really good conversations—with my boss, with my team, even with peers where there’s some friction in the relationship. They’re happy to tell me one thing to change, and often they’re right. It does help us work more smoothly together.”

Research has shown that those who explicitly seek critical feedback (that is, who are not just fishing for praise) tend to get higher performance ratings. Why? Mainly, we think, because someone who’s asking for coaching is more likely to take what is said to heart and genuinely improve. But also because when you ask for feedback, you not only find out how others see you, you also *influence* how they see you. Soliciting constructive criticism communicates humility, respect, passion for excellence, and confidence, all in one go.

6. Engage in small experiments

After you've worked to solicit and understand feedback, it may still be hard to discern which bits of advice will help you and which ones won't. We suggest designing small experiments to find out. Even though you may doubt that a suggestion will be useful, if the downside risk is small and the upside potential is large, it's worth a try. James, the CFO we discussed earlier, decided to take the board member's advice for the next presentation and see what happened. Some directors were pleased with the change, but the shift in format prompted others to offer suggestions of their own. Today James reverse-engineers his presentations to meet board members' current top-of-mind concerns. He sends out an email a week beforehand asking for any burning questions and either front-loads his talk with answers to them or signals at the start that he will get to them later on. "It's a little more challenging to prepare for but actually much easier to give," he says. "I spend less time fielding unexpected questions, which was the hardest part of the job."

That's an example worth following. When someone gives you advice, test it out. If it works, great. If it doesn't, you can try again, tweak your approach, or decide to end the experiment. Criticism is never easy to take. Even when you know that it's essential to your development and you trust that the person delivering it wants you to succeed, it can activate psychological triggers. You might feel

misjudged, ill-used, and sometimes threatened to your very core.

Your growth depends on your ability to pull value from criticism in spite of your natural responses and on your willingness to seek out even more advice and coaching from bosses, peers, and subordinates. They may be good or bad at providing it, or they may have little time for it—but you are the most important factor in your own development. If you're determined to learn from whatever feedback you get, no one can stop you.

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Shakespeare's Characters Show Us How Personal Growth Should Happen

By Declan Fitzsimons

Norman Mailer once wrote that there is a cruel but just law of life that says we must change or pay an increasing cost for remaining the same.

As a leadership scholar teaching in a business school, I encounter leaders daily for whom this “law” is a very real and disquieting one. They know what will happen if they don’t make the changes to their businesses, but they are not so sure what *they* should do to support those changes. Is it about learning how to run more effective team meetings? Or how to be better listeners? Or adopting a different leadership style to bring about a shift in organizational culture?

While there is no formulaic answer to these questions, there are some fundamentals without which no amount of

skills development is ever going to work. One source of insight into what these fundamentals might look like is the work of an author whose work has never been out of print for over 400 years: William Shakespeare.

In the opening chapter of his book *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, Harold Bloom, who has taught Shakespeare at Yale for 30 years, suggests that before Shakespeare, characters in plays would *unfold* but not necessarily *develop*.

If a character merely unfolds, we intuit correctly that we already know all there is to know about them when they first appear onstage. Their authors have robbed them of the one quality that would make them interesting: the capacity for self-inquiry that might reveal something unexpected not only to us but also to themselves. They teach us little because they cannot surprise us, essentially because they cannot surprise themselves. This is the real-world equivalent of the manager who comes out of a feedback session and thinks, “Nothing new—the same feedback as I have heard before,” and then says to themselves, “I guess I am what I am!” or “I have my way of doing things, and some people like it and some people don’t.”

Shakespeare does not let us off the hook so easily. He shows us that we are not simply who we say we are, but instead are made up of many conflicting and unknown parts. As Bloom puts it, Shakespeare’s characters develop

because they have the ability to *overhear* themselves talk, either to themselves or to others, and are thus able to *reconceive* themselves. By endowing his characters with complex inner worlds, Shakespeare treats us, 400 years before Freud, to virtuoso displays of what to the modern ear sounds very much like self-discovery. There is not one Hamlet but many. After learning of his father's murder, he discovers in soliloquies of stunning intensity that he cannot bear to remain as he is. So tortured is he by his inner conflicts that he considers, in perhaps the most famous soliloquy in all literature, the pros and cons of suicide ("to be or not to be").

We are mesmerized—not simply through the beauty of the language, but because we realize that he is hearing these things *for the first time*. And no matter how many times we see the play, we never tire of it, because it is at such moments that Hamlet, while in real danger of unraveling, is at the same time exquisitely vulnerable and thus truly human.

Shakespeare shows us through Hamlet and other characters not only the *sine qua non* of human development—that in order to change ourselves, we must first discover ourselves—but also what that development sounds like, looks like, and feels like. He shows us that it is the moment when Hamlet is so close to falling apart that he is able to fall together. In like fashion, the young Prince Hal, in *Henry*

IV, Part 2, on becoming king, shuns his former companions (“Presume not that I am the thing I was”) and begins his extraordinary transformation from profligate prince to King Henry V, hero of Agincourt.

For us, far away from the dramatic intensity of fictional characters, the point is not that we can change only if we contemplate killing ourselves or turn our backs on our friends; change is rather about moving toward, rather than away from, the anxieties that powerful external challenges provoke in our internal worlds. Hamlet was able to face his own inertia and cowardice; Hal was able to confront and thus transcend his dissolute lifestyle and embrace a new identity fit for a king. But both were possible only after the characters became willing to discover what lay within.

Shakespeare teaches us moderns that in the face of an uncertain world, self-awareness—that much-vaunted leadership quality—is only worthy of the name when it is revelatory. And it can only be revelatory when we are willing to concede that we know ourselves only partially.

Development, then, is less about changing ourselves by learning new skills than about discovering ourselves by giving something up—including some of our most cherished notions of the person we think we are—in order to discover the person we could become.

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Purpose, Meaning, and Passion

HBR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE SERIES

Finding Meaning at Work, Even When Your Job Is Dull

By Morten Hansen and Dacher Keltner

Do you experience meaning at work—or just emptiness?

In the United States, people spend an average of 35 to 40 hours working every week. That's some 80,000 hours during a career—more time than you will spend with your kids probably. Beyond the paycheck, what does work give you? Few questions could be more important. It is sad to walk through life experiencing work as empty, dreadful, a chore—something that saps energy out of your body and soul. Yet many employees feel this way, as evidenced by one large-scale study showing that only 31% of employees were engaged.¹

Work can, however, provide an array of meaningful experiences, even though many employees do not enjoy

them in their current job. So what are the sources of meaningful experiences at work?

We have compiled a list based on our reading of literature in organization behavior and psychology. Many theories speak to meaning at work, including need-based, motivational, status, power, and community theories. The phrase “meaning at work” refers to a person’s experience of something meaningful—something of value—that work provides. That is not the same as “meaningful work,” which refers to the task itself. Work is a social arena that offers other kinds of meaningful experiences as well.

Before we run through the list, it is important to note:

- Different people look for different types of meaning.
- Different workplaces provide different meanings.

Purpose

Contributions beyond yourself

The people at nonprofit Kiva channel microloans to poor people who can use the money to get a small business going and improve their lives. Their work clearly has a greater purpose—that of helping people in need. This taps into a longing to have a meaningful life defined as making contributions beyond oneself.

The problem is, however, that most work doesn't have such a higher purpose, either because the job is basically mundane or because—let's face it—the company doesn't really have a social mission. Critics of workplace culture like economics researcher Umair Haque argue that work that involves selling yet more burgers, sugar water, high-fashion clothing, and the like has no broader purpose whatsoever. In this view, Coke's "Open happiness" tagline is just a slogan devoid of meaning. However, as researchers Teresa Amabile and Steve Kramer argue, much work can be infused with some level of purpose. (See [chapter 9](#) of this book for more on gradual steps toward meaningful work.) Companies that make real efforts in social responsibilities do this. For example, Danone, the \$25 billion large and highly successful consumer goods company that sells yogurt, has defined their business as providing healthy foods (which led them to sell off their biscuit business). The litmus test here is whether employees experience that their work makes positive contributions to others. If they do, then they experience meaning at work.

Self-realization

Learning

Many MBA graduates flock to McKinsey, BCG, and other consultancies so that they can rapidly acquire valuable skills. General Electric is renowned for developing general managers, and people who want to become marketers crave to learn that trade at Procter & Gamble. Work offers opportunities to learn, expand one's horizon, and improve self-awareness. This kind of personal growth is meaningful.

Accomplishment

Work is also a place to accomplish things and be recognized, which leads to greater satisfaction, confidence, and self-worth. In the documentary *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* we see Japan's greatest sushi chef devote his life to making perfect sushi. Some critics like Lucy Kellaway at the *Financial Times* say there isn't a real social mission here. But the main character's quest for perfection—to make better sushi all the time—gives his life a deep sense of meaning. And for Jiro, the work itself—making the sushi—gives him a deep intrinsic satisfaction.

Prestige

Status

At cocktail parties, a frequent question is “Where do you work?” The ability to rattle off “Oh, I am a doctor at Harvard Medical School” oozes status. For some, that

moment is worth all the grueling night shifts. A high-status organization confers respect, recognition, and a sense of worth to employees, and that provides meaning at work for some.

Power

As Paul Lawrence and Nitin Nohria write about in their book *Driven*, for those drawn to power, work provides an arena for acquiring and exercising power. You may not be one of those, but if you are, you experience work as meaningful because you have and can use power.

Social rewards

Belonging to a community

Companies like Southwest Airlines go out of their way to create a company atmosphere where people feel they belong. In a society where people increasingly are “bowling alone,” people crave a place where they can forge friendships and experience a sense of community. (In his book of the same name, Robert Putnam describes the American decline in bowling leagues as a metaphor for a larger cultural shift away from formal social structures.²) The workplace can complement or even be a substitute for other communities (family, the neighborhood, clubs and so

on). Workplaces that provide a sense of community give people meaning.

Agency

Employees also experience meaning at work when what they do actually matters for the organization, when their ideas are listened to and when they see that their contributions have an impact on how the place performs. A sense of real involvement gives people meaning.

Autonomy

As Dan Pink shows in his book *Drive*, autonomy—the absence of others who tell you what to do and the freedom to do your own work in your own time—is a great intrinsic motivator. Some people are drawn to certain kinds of work that provides a great deal of autonomy. For example, entrepreneurs frequently go into business by themselves so that they can be their own boss. This kind of freedom gives work meaning.

There are no doubt other sources as well, but the ones listed here seem to be especially important. Which of them are important to you? And which do you receive from your current workplace? Having more sources of meaning is not

necessarily better; experiencing one deeply may just be enough. But it's an issue if you don't experience any at all.

MORTEN HANSEN is a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, and at INSEAD, France, and is the author of *Collaboration: How Leaders Avoid the Traps, Build Common Ground, and Reap Big Results* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2009). **DACHER KELTNER** is a professor of psychology at UC Berkeley and the author of *Born to Be Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life* (W. W. Norton, 2009).

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What to Do When Your Heart Isn't in Your Work Anymore

By Andy Molinsky

In an ideal world, our work lives would be completely fulfilling, full of meaning, and intrinsically motivating. But what if they're not? What if you're stuck in a job or a career that you once loved, but your heart isn't in it anymore?

More people fit this profile than you'd think. According to a 2017 Gallup survey, only one-third of U.S. employees feel engaged at work; that is, only one in three workers brings a consistently high level of initiative, commitment, passion, and productivity to their job.¹ That leaves the majority of employees less than satisfied with their work.

And truth be told, there could be any number of reasons for this sense of malaise. You might feel stuck doing the same thing over and over again. You might question the ultimate meaning of the work you're doing.

You might feel micromanaged or that company leaders don't know or care about your learning and growth. Or maybe your own growth and development since starting your career has caused you to change your passions and priorities in life.

I see and hear examples of career malaise all the time—in my work teaching and training people in companies, in discussions following my corporate talks, and in conversations with my family and friends. Though the tendency among some of us in this situation is to simply grin and bear it, current scientific research suggests ways to reimagine—or reenvision—an uninspired professional existence.

Assess what you want out of your work—at this point in your life

Not everyone wants a high-powered career. In fact, according to research by Yale associate professor of organizational psychology Amy Wrzesniewski, people tend to fall into one of three categories: Some see their work as a career, others see it as just a job, and still others see it as a calling.² It's this third category of people, perhaps unsurprisingly, who exhibit higher performance and a greater sense of satisfaction with their jobs. The key for you is to determine what you care about *now*—what drives

you, what you're passionate about, what truly motivates you—and build from there. It's quite possible that what drove your career in your twenties is no longer appealing. Don't force your 40-, 50-, or 60-year-old self into your 20-year-old sense of ambition. Even if you don't find your true calling, you will at least increase the odds of finding a meaningful work experience.

See if parts of your job are “craftable”

There has been considerable research on the idea of job crafting, in which you tweak certain aspects of your job to gain a greater sense of meaning and satisfaction. Research by Wrzesniewski and two other organizational behavior scholars, Justin Berg and Jane Dutton, has shown that people can be quite imaginative and effective at reimagining the design of their job in personally meaningful ways.

For example, if you enjoy analysis but not sales, can you adjust your responsibilities in that direction? If you love interacting with others but feel lonely, can you find ways to partner more on projects? One participant from Berg, Dutton, and Wrzesniewski's research redesigned her marketing job to include more event planning, even though it wasn't originally part of her job. The reason was quite simple: She liked it and was good at it, and by doing so, she

could add value to the company and to her own work experience.³

Or consider this activity: Imagine that you're a job architect, and do a "before" and "after" sketch of your job responsibilities, with the "before" representing the uninspiring status quo and the "after" representing future possibilities.⁴ What novel tweaks can you make to redesign your job, even slightly? Sometimes even the smallest adjustments can lead to qualitatively meaningful changes in your work experience.

Ignite your passion outside of work

It might be a latent hobby you've told yourself you don't have the time for, a personal project that isn't related to your job or career, or a "side hustle" where you can experiment with innovative or entrepreneurial ideas on a smaller scale. Having an outlet for your passion outside of work can counterbalance the monotony of the nine-to-five daily grind. These inspirational endeavors can even have unintended positive spillover effects at work, giving you energy and inspiration to craft your job or reengage with parts of it you actually like.⁵

If all else fails, make a change

Think about changing your career like you'd think about changing your house. When you originally bought your house, you had certain requirements. But since then, your priorities may have changed, or maybe you have simply outgrown it. Do you move, renovate, or stay put? You can think the exact same way about your job and career. Have your priorities and needs changed? Can you tweak or “renovate” your job? Or do you need to move on?

Of course, if you choose to change your career, you'll want to think it through and prepare yourself before jumping in with both feet. Network with people in professions you might be interested in, get your finances in order, and test out the new career (perhaps on the weekend or at night) before making the change. It can feel daunting to change everything so suddenly, but it's important to consider the option if you're truly feeling a deep sense of malaise at work.

The most important thing, though, if you're finding your interest waning at work, is not to lose hope. You *can* find ways to ignite your passion again—or at least make slight changes so you won't feel so hopeless. You'll likely be surprised at how resilient and resourceful you are as you walk down the path of career renovation.

ANDY MOLINSKY is a professor of organizational behavior at the Brandeis International Business School. He's the author

of *Global Dexterity: How to Adapt Your Behavior Across Cultures Without Losing Yourself in the Process* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2013) and *Reach: A New Strategy to Help You Step Outside Your Comfort Zone, Rise to the Challenge, and Build Confidence* (Avery, 2017).

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You Don't Find Your Purpose—You Build It

By John Coleman

How do I find my purpose?”

Ever since Daniel Gulati, Oliver Segovia, and I published our book *Passion and Purpose* six years ago, I've received hundreds of questions—from younger and older people alike—about purpose. We're all looking for purpose. Most of us feel that we've never found it, we've lost it, or in some way we're falling short.

But in the midst of all this angst, I think we're also suffering from what I see as fundamental misconceptions about purpose, neatly encapsulated by the question I receive most frequently: *How do I find my purpose?* Challenging these misconceptions can help us all develop a more well-rounded vision of purpose.

Misconception #1: Purpose is only a thing you find

On social media, I often see an inspiring quotation attributed to Mark Twain: “The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why.” It neatly articulates what I’ll call the “Hollywood version” of purpose. Like Neo in *The Matrix* or Rey in *Star Wars*, we’re all just moving through life waiting until fate delivers a higher calling to us.

Make no mistake: That can happen, at least in some form. I recently saw Scott Harrison, founder and CEO of respected nonprofit Charity: Water, speak, and in many ways his story was about how he found a higher purpose after a period of wandering. But I think it’s more rare than most people think. For the average 20-year-old in college or 40-year-old in an unfulfilling job, searching for the silver bullet to give life meaning is more likely to end in frustration than fulfillment.

In achieving professional purpose, most of us have to focus as much on *making* our work meaningful as in *taking* meaning from it. Put differently, purpose is a thing you build, not a thing you find. Almost any work can possess remarkable purpose. School bus drivers bear enormous responsibility—caring for and keeping safe dozens of children—and are an essential part of assuring our children receive the education they need and deserve. Nurses play an essential role not simply in treating people’s medical conditions but also in guiding them through some of life’s

most difficult times. Cashiers can be a friendly, uplifting interaction in someone's day—often desperately needed—or a forgettable or regrettable one. But in each of these instances, purpose is often primarily derived from focusing on what's so meaningful and purposeful about the job and on doing it in such a way that that meaning is enhanced and takes center stage. Sure, some jobs more naturally lend themselves to a sense of meaning, but many require at least some deliberate effort to invest them with the purpose we seek.

Misconception #2: Purpose is a single thing

The second misconception I often hear is that purpose can be articulated as a single thing. Some people genuinely do seem to have an overwhelming purpose in their lives. Mother Teresa lived her life to serve the poor. Samuel Johnson poured every part of himself into his writing. Marie Curie devoted her energy to her work.

And yet even these luminaries had other sources of purpose in their lives. Mother Teresa served the poor as part of what she believed was a higher calling. Curie, the Nobel prize-winning scientist, was also a devoted wife and mother (she wrote a biography of her husband, Pierre, and one of her daughters—Irene—won her own Nobel prize). And Johnson, beyond his writing, was known to be a great

humanitarian in his community, often caring personally for the poor.

Most of us will have multiple sources of purpose in our lives. I find purpose in my children, my marriage, my faith, my writing, my work, and my community. For almost everyone, there's no one thing we can find. It's not *purpose* but *purposes* we are looking for: the multiple sources of meaning that help us find value in our work and lives. Professional commitments are only one component of this meaning, and often our work isn't central to our purpose but a conduit to helping others, including our families and communities. Acknowledging that there are multiple sources of purpose takes the pressure off of finding one single thing to give our lives meaning.

Misconception #3: Purpose is stable over time

It's common now for people to have multiple careers in their lifetimes. I know one individual, for example, who recently left a successful private equity career to found a startup. I know two more who recently left business careers to run for elective office. And whether or not we switch professional commitments, most of us will experience personal phases in which our sources of meaning change—childhood, young adulthood, parenthood, and empty-nesting, to name a few.

This evolution in our sources of purpose isn't flaky or demonstrative of a lack of commitment but rather natural and good. Just as we all find meaning in multiple places, the sources of that meaning can and do change over time. My focus and sense of purpose at 20 was dramatically different in many ways than it is now, and the same could be said of almost anyone you meet.

How do you find your purpose? That's the wrong question to ask. We should be looking to endow every thing we do with purpose, to allow for the multiple sources of meaning that will naturally develop in our lives, and to be comfortable with those sources changing over time. Unpacking what we mean by "purpose" can allow us to better understand its presence and role in our lives.

JOHN COLEMAN is a coauthor of the book *Passion and Purpose: Stories from the Best and Brightest Young Business Leaders* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2013).

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How to Find Meaning in a Job That Isn't Your True Calling

By Emily Esfahani Smith

Why do so few people find fulfillment in their work?

A few years ago I posed this question to Amy Wrzesniewski, a Yale School of Management professor who studies these issues, and she offered an explanation that made a lot of sense. Students, she told me, “think their calling is under a rock, and if they turn over enough rocks, they will find it.”

Surveys confirm that meaning is the top thing millennials say they want from a job. And yet her research shows that less than 50% of people see their work as a calling. So many of her students are left feeling anxious and frustrated and completely unsatisfied by the good jobs and careers they do secure.¹

What they—and many of us, I think—fail to realize is that work can be meaningful even if you don't think of it as a calling. The four most common occupations in America are retail salesperson, cashier, food preparer or server, and office clerk—jobs that aren't typically associated with meaning.² But all have something in common with roles that are considered meaningful, such as clergy, teachers, and doctors: They exist to help others. And as Adam Grant, an organizational psychologist and professor at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School, has shown, people who see their work as a form of giving consistently rank their jobs as more meaningful.³

That means you can find meaning in nearly any role in nearly any organization. After all, most companies create products or services to fill a need in the world, and all employees contribute in their own way. The key is to become more conscious about the service you're providing—as a whole and personally.

How? One way is to connect with the end user or beneficiary. In one study, Grant and his colleagues found that fundraisers in a university call center who'd been introduced to a student whose education was being paid for by the money raised spent 142% more time on the phone with potential donors and raised 171% more cash than peers who hadn't met those scholarship recipients. Whether your customers are external or internal, an

increased focus on them, and how you help them live their lives or do their jobs, can help you find more meaning in yours.

Another strategy is to constantly remind yourself of your organization's overarching goal. There's a great story about a janitor that John F. Kennedy ran into at NASA in 1962. When the president asked him what he was doing, the man said, "I'm helping put a man on the moon." Life is Good is an apparel company best known for colorful T-shirts with stick-figure designs, but its mission is to spread optimism and hope throughout the world, and that's something that even the company's warehouse employees understand. If you work for an accounting firm, you're helping people or companies with the unpleasant task of doing their taxes. If you're a fast-food cook, you're providing a family with a cheap and delicious meal. Each of these jobs serves a purpose in the world.

Even if you can't get excited about your company's mission or customers, you can still adopt a service mindset by thinking about how your work helps those you love. Consider a study of women working in a coupon-processing factory in Mexico. Researchers led by Jochen Menges, a professor of leadership and organizational behavior at WHU-Otto Beisheim School of Management, found that those who described the work as dull were generally less productive than those who said it was rewarding. But the

effects went away for those in the former group who saw the work (however tedious) as a way to support their families. With that attitude, they were just as productive and energized as the coupon processors who didn't mind the task. Many people understand the purpose of their jobs in a similar manner. The work they do helps them pay their mortgage, go on vacation—or even support a hobby that gives meaning to their lives, like volunteer tutoring, gardening, or woodworking.

Not everyone finds their one true calling. But that doesn't mean we're doomed to work meaningless jobs. If we reframe our tasks as opportunities to help others, any occupation can feel more significant.

EMILY ESFAHANI SMITH is the author of *The Power of Meaning: Crafting a Life That Matters* (Crown, 2017) and an editor at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, where she manages the Ben Franklin Circles project, a collaboration with the 92nd Street Y and Citizen University to build meaning in local communities.

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You're Never Done Finding Purpose at Work

By Dan Pontefract

Do you dread going into the office on Monday morning? Maybe a new boss has entered the equation, creating a rift between how you once felt and how you feel now. Perhaps your company has recently been acquired, and the culture has changed. Maybe you simply have outgrown your role and are bored to tears in your cubicle.

I have found that whether or not we enjoy our work often boils down to how our job fits with our sense of purpose. Where we work, the role we hold, our broader sense of purpose—all three are subject to change. Thus, if we want to stay in the “sweet spot” among these three, we must not fear career transitions or even change itself; indeed, we must seek them out.

Having a sense of purpose in our life is critical to well-being. In fact, in a longitudinal study, researchers found that people who demonstrate a sense of purpose in their

lives have a 15% lower risk of early death.¹ Having a sense of purpose in our roles at work is equally important. And yet it's not enough to find that sense of purpose once—you have to continually find it as circumstances (and you) change.

“I am cautious and alert and mindful that the battle is not won yet” is how Céline Schillinger, an executive at vaccine maker Sanofi Pasteur, describes staying on this learning journey. “I will not fall into complacency. No matter what, I will continue to hone myself.” In 2001 Schillinger landed a position in France at the company. To date, she has occupied positions in human resources, product development, and stakeholder engagement. She moved to Boston in 2015 to focus on quality innovation. “I would define myself as a person under construction,” she told me. “I’m always trying to enrich my experience by adding bits and pieces wherever I go. I experiment in my roles and push for uncomfortableness to eventually gain new knowledge out of each situation.”

Schillinger's story shows that you don't have to quit your company to stay engaged. However, sometimes a more radical change is needed. Consider the story of Mana Ionescu. She worked hard to climb the ladder at the U.S.-based company she worked for, and she was in line for the director role. But Ionescu was frustrated by the transactional nature of her work. Creativity was minimal.

Inspiration was nominal. “There must be more to my working life than just sitting here making money and not actually making an impact,” she thought. She decided to leave her organization and founded Lightspan Digital, a digital marketing company based in Chicago that specializes in social media, email, and content marketing. Ionescu recognized that she had to take charge of both her personal life and her working life—and ever since, she has been living *and* working with a sense of purpose. It’s up to each of us to know when to make that leap.

Try this exercise. At the end of the workday, jot down approximately how much time you spent in each of the following three mindsets:

- *Job mindset.* When someone has a job mindset, they resort to a “paycheck mentality,” performing their duties in return for compensation and not much else.
- *Career mindset.* This mindset occurs when an individual is focused on increasing or advancing their salary, title, power, team size, or sphere of control.
- *Purpose mindset.* Feeling passionate, innovative, and committed are hallmarks of this mindset, as is having an outward-looking focus on serving the broader organization or key stakeholders. Here, your

professional purpose feels aligned with your personal purpose.

Keep a log for a couple of weeks, and see whether you fall into one of these mindsets more than the others. If the job and career mindsets total more than 50% of your time, that may be a warning sign that you need to restate or redefine your personal purpose.

No one lives in the purpose mindset all the time, but spending too much time in the career or job mindsets is destructive: You are certain to be dissatisfied with your job, and these mindsets can end up harming your reputation, chances of promotion, and long-term prospects. While everyone should be trying to develop and grow, focusing too much on your career or your paycheck can lead to bad behaviors such as bullying and selfishness or simply trying to exert too much control over others. Before that happens, seek a new role, and perhaps a new organization, that rebalances your equation.

If you have never created a personal declaration of purpose, now is the time. A declaration of purpose is a simple statement about how you will decide to live each and every day. Make it succinct, specific, jargon free, and expressive. Your statement ought to be personal, and it should integrate your strengths, interests, and core ambitions. Here's mine: "We're not here to see through

each other; we're here to see each other through." (For more on a personal declaration of purpose, see [chapter 6](#) of this book.)

Take into account all three types of purpose: personal, job, and organization. But don't shortchange your personal purpose, which is a common error, according to A. R. Elangovan, a professor of organizational behavior at the University of Victoria in Canada. As he told me, "Especially in contrast to organizational and role purpose, where multiple stakeholders shape the outcomes, my advice is to invest as much effort [as possible] into figuring out our personal purpose."

Life is short. You deserve to work in a role, and for an organization, where your personal purpose shines. But you cannot leave it up to the organization, your boss, or your team. It really does come down to you defining and enacting your purpose.

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Note

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From Purpose to Impact

By Nick Craig and Scott A. Snook

The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why.

—Mark Twain

Over the past five years, there's been an explosion of interest in purpose-driven leadership. Academics argue persuasively that an executive's most important role is to be a steward of the organization's purpose. Business experts make the case that purpose is a key to exceptional performance, while psychologists describe it as the pathway to greater well-being.

Doctors have even found that people with purpose in their lives are less prone to disease. Purpose is increasingly being touted as the key to navigating the complex, volatile, ambiguous world we face today, where strategy is ever changing and few decisions are obviously right or wrong.

Despite this growing understanding, however, a big challenge remains. In our work training thousands of managers at organizations from GE to the Girl Scouts, and teaching an equal number of executives and students at Harvard Business School, we've found that fewer than 20% of leaders have a strong sense of their own individual purpose. Even fewer can distill their purpose into a concrete statement. They may be able to clearly articulate their organization's mission: Think of Google's "To organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful," or Charles Schwab's "A relentless ally for the individual investor." But when asked to describe their own purpose, they typically fall back on something generic and nebulous: "Help others excel." "Ensure success." "Empower my people." Just as problematic, hardly any of them have a clear plan for translating purpose into action. As a result, they limit their aspirations and often fail to achieve their most ambitious professional and personal goals.

Our purpose is to change that—to help executives find and define their leadership purpose and put it to use. Building on the seminal work of our colleague Bill George, our programs initially covered a wide range of topics related to authentic leadership, but in recent years purpose has emerged as the cornerstone of our teaching and coaching. Executives tell us it is the key to accelerating

their growth and deepening their impact, in both their professional and personal lives. Indeed, we believe that the process of articulating your purpose and finding the courage to live it—what we call *purpose to impact*—is the single most important developmental task you can undertake as a leader.

Consider Dolf van den Brink, the president and CEO of Heineken USA. Working with us, he identified a decidedly unique purpose statement—“To be the wuxia master who saves the kingdom”—which reflects his love of Chinese kung fu movies, the inspiration he takes from the wise, skillful warriors in them, and the realization that he, too, revels in high-risk situations that compel him to take action. With that impetus, he was able to create a plan for reviving a challenged legacy business during extremely difficult economic conditions. We’ve also watched a retail operations chief call on his newly clarified purpose —“Compelled to make things better, whomever, wherever, however”—to make the “hard, cage-rattling changes” needed to beat back a global competitor. And we’ve seen a factory director in Egypt use his purpose—“Create families that excel”—to persuade employees that they should honor the 2012 protest movement not by joining the marches but by maintaining their loyalties to one another and keeping their shared operation running.

We've seen similar results outside the corporate world. Kathi Snook (Scott's wife) is a retired army colonel who'd been struggling to reengage in work after several years as a stay-at-home mom. But after nailing her purpose statement—"To be the gentle, behind-the-scenes, kick-in-the-ass reason for success," something she'd done throughout her military career and with her kids—she decided to run for a hotly contested school committee seat, and won.

And we've implemented this thinking across organizations. Unilever is a company that is committed to purpose-driven leadership, and Jonathan Donner, the head of global learning there, has been a key partner in refining our approach. Working with his company and several other organizations, we've helped more than 1,000 leaders through the purpose-to-impact process and have begun to track and review their progress over the past two to three years. Many have seen dramatic results, ranging from two-step promotions to sustained improvement in business results. Most important, the vast majority tell us they've developed a new ability to thrive in even the most challenging times.

In this article, we share our step-by-step framework to start you down the same path. We'll explain how to identify your purpose and then develop an impact plan to achieve concrete results.

What is purpose?

Most of us go to our graves with our music still inside us, unplayed.

—Oliver Wendell Holmes

Your leadership purpose is who you are and what makes you distinctive. Whether you're an entrepreneur at a startup or the CEO of a *Fortune* 500 company, a call center rep or a software developer, your purpose is your brand, what you're driven to achieve, the magic that makes you tick. It's not *what* you do, it's *how* you do your job and *why*—the strengths and passions you bring to the table no matter where you're seated. Although you may express your purpose in different ways in different contexts, it's what everyone close to you recognizes as uniquely you and would miss most if you were gone.

When Kathi Snook shared her purpose statement with her family and friends, the response was instantaneous and overwhelming: "Yes! That's you—all business, all the time!" In every role and every context—as captain of the army gymnastics team, as a math teacher at West Point, informally with her family and friends—she had always led from behind, a gentle but forceful catalyst for others' success. Through this new lens, she was able to see herself—and her future—more clearly. When Dolf van den Brink

revealed his newly articulated purpose to his wife, she easily recognized the “wuxia master” who had led his employees through the turmoil of serious fighting and unrest in the Congo and was now ready to attack the challenges at Heineken USA head-on.

At its core, your leadership purpose springs from your identity, the essence of who you are. Purpose is not a list of the education, experience, and skills you’ve gathered in your life. We’ll use ourselves as examples. The fact that Scott is a retired army colonel with an MBA and a PhD is not his purpose. His purpose is “to help others live more ‘meaning-full’ lives.” Purpose is also not a professional title, limited to your current job or organization. Nick’s purpose is not “To lead the Authentic Leadership Institute.” That’s his job. His purpose is “To wake you up and have you find that you are home.” He has been doing just that since he was a teenager, and if you sit next to him on the shuttle from Boston to New York, he’ll wake you up (figuratively), too. He simply can’t help himself.

Purpose is definitely not some jargon-filled catchall (“Empower my team to achieve exceptional business results while delighting our customers”). It should be specific and personal, resonating with you and you alone. It doesn’t have to be aspirational or cause based (“Save the whales” or “Feed the hungry”). And it’s not what you think it should be—it’s who you can’t help being. In fact, it might

not necessarily be all that flattering (“Be the thorn in people’s side that keeps them moving!”).

How do you find it?

To be nobody but yourself in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else, means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight; and never stop fighting.

—E.E. Cummings

Finding your leadership purpose is not easy. If it were, we’d all know exactly why we’re here and be living that purpose every minute of every day. As E.E. Cummings suggests, we are constantly bombarded by powerful messages (from parents, bosses, management gurus, advertisers, celebrities) about what we should be (smarter, stronger, richer) and about how to lead (empower others, lead from behind, be authentic, distribute power). To figure out who you are in such a world, let alone “be nobody but yourself,” is indeed hard work. However, our experience shows that when you have a clear sense of who you are, everything else follows naturally.

Some people will come to the purpose-to-impact journey with a natural bent toward introspection and reflection. Others will find the experience uncomfortable and anxiety provoking. A few will just roll their eyes. We’ve

worked with leaders of all stripes and can attest that even the most skeptical discover personal and professional value in the experience. At one multinational corporation, we worked with a senior lawyer who characterized himself as “the least likely person to ever find this stuff useful.” Yet he became such a supporter that he required all his people to do the program. “I have never read a self-help book, and I don’t plan to,” he told his staff. “But if you want to become an exceptional leader, you have to know your leadership purpose.” The key to engaging both the dreamers and the skeptics is to build a process that has room to express individuality but also offers step-by-step practical guidance.

The first task is to mine your life story for common threads and major themes. The point is to identify your core, lifelong strengths, values, and passions—those pursuits that energize you and bring you joy. We use a variety of prompts but have found three to be most effective:

- What did you especially love doing when you were a child, before the world told you what you should or shouldn’t like or do? Describe a moment and how it made you feel.
- Tell us about two of your most challenging life experiences. How have they shaped you?

- What do you enjoy doing in your life now that helps you sing your song?

We strongly recommend grappling with these questions in a small group of a few peers, because we've found that it's almost impossible for people to identify their leadership purpose by themselves. You can't get a clear picture of yourself without trusted colleagues or friends to act as mirrors.

After this reflective work, take a shot at crafting a clear, concise, and declarative statement of purpose: "My leadership purpose is _____. " The words in your purpose statement must be yours. They must capture your essence. And they must call you to action.

To give you an idea of how the process works, consider the experiences of a few executives. When we asked one manager about her childhood passions, she told us about growing up in rural Scotland and delighting in "discovery" missions. One day, she and a friend set out determined to find frogs and spent the whole day going from pond to pond, turning over every stone. Just before dark, she discovered a single frog and was triumphant. The purpose statement she later crafted—"Always find the frogs!"—is perfect for her current role as the senior VP of R&D for her company.

Another executive used two “crucible” life experiences to craft her purpose. The first was personal: Years before, as a divorced young mother of two, she found herself homeless and begging on the street, but she used her wits to get back on her feet. The second was professional: During the economic crisis of 2008, she had to oversee her company’s retrenchment from Asia and was tasked with closing the flagship operation in the region. Despite the near hopeless job environment, she was able to help every one of her employees find another job before letting them go. After discussing these stories with her group, she shifted her purpose statement from “Continually and consistently develop and facilitate the growth and development of myself and others leading to great performance” to “With tenacity, create brilliance.”

Dolf came to his “wuxia master” statement after exploring not only his film preferences but also his extraordinary crucible experience in the Congo, when militants were threatening the brewery he managed and he had to order it barricaded to protect his employees and prevent looting. The Egyptian factory director focused on family as his purpose because his stories revealed that familial love and support had been the key to facing every challenge in his life, while the retail operations chief used “Compelled to improve” after realizing that his greatest

achievements had always come when he pushed himself and others out of their comfort zones.

As you review your stories, you will see a unifying thread, just as these executives did. Pull it, and you'll uncover your purpose. (The exhibit "[Purpose Statements](#)" offers a sampling of purpose statements.)

Purpose statements

FROM BAD . . .	TO GOOD . . .
Lead new markets department to achieve exceptional business results	Eliminate chaos
Be a driver in the infrastructure business that allows each person to achieve their needed outcomes while also mastering the new drivers of our business as I balance my family and work demands	Bring water and power to the two billion people who do not have it
Continually and consistently develop and facilitate the growth and development of myself and others, leading to great performance	With tenacity, create brilliance

How do you put your purpose into action?

This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one.

—George Bernard Shaw

Clarifying your purpose as a leader is critical, but writing the statement is not enough. You must also envision the impact you'll have on your world as a result of living your

purpose. Your actions—not your words—are what really matter. Of course, it's virtually impossible for any of us to fully live into our purpose 100% of the time. But with work and careful planning, we can do it more often, more consciously, wholeheartedly, and effectively.

Purpose-to-impact plans differ from traditional development plans in several important ways: They start with a statement of leadership purpose rather than of a business or career goal. They take a holistic view of professional and personal life rather than ignore the fact that you have a family or outside interests and commitments. They incorporate meaningful, purpose-infused language to create a document that speaks to you, not just to any person in your job or role. They force you to envision long-term opportunities for living your purpose (three to five years out) and then help you to work backward from there (two years out, one year, six months, three months, 30 days) to set specific goals for achieving them.

When executives approach development in this purpose-driven way, their aspirations—for instance, Kathi's decision to get involved in the school board, or the Egyptian factory director's ambition to run manufacturing and logistics across the Middle East—are stoked. Leaders also become more energized in their current roles. Dolf's impact plan inspired him to tackle his role at Heineken USA

with four mottos for his team: “Be brave,” “Decide and do,” “Hunt as a pack,” and “Take it personally.” When Unilever executive Jostein Solheim created a development plan around his purpose—“To be part of a global movement that makes changing the world seem fun and achievable”—he realized he wanted to stay on as CEO of the Ben & Jerry’s business rather than moving up the corporate ladder.

Purpose-to-impact planning versus traditional development planning

PURPOSE-TO-IMPACT PLANNING	TRADITIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING
Uses meaningful, purpose-infused language	Uses standard business language
Is focused on strengths to realize career aspirations	Is focused on weaknesses to address performance
Elicits a statement of leadership purpose that explains how you will lead	States a business- or career-driven goal
Sets incremental goals related to living your leadership purpose	Measures success using metrics tied to the firm’s mission and goals
Focuses on the future, working backward	Focuses on the present, working forward
Is unique to you; addresses who you are as a leader	Is generic; addresses the job or role
Takes a holistic view of work and family	Ignores goals and responsibilities outside the office

Let's now look at a hypothetical purpose-to-impact plan (representing a composite of several people with whom we've worked) for an in-depth view of the process. "Richard" arrived at his purpose only after being prodded into talking about his lifelong passion for sailing; suddenly, he'd found a set of experiences and language that could redefine how he saw his job in procurement.

Richard's development plan leads with the *purpose statement* he crafted: "To harness all the elements to win the race." This is followed by *an explanation* of why that's his purpose: Research shows that understanding what motivates us dramatically increases our ability to achieve big goals.

Next, Richard addresses his *three- to five-year goals* using the language of his purpose statement. We find that this is a good time frame to target first; several years is long enough that even the most disillusioned managers could imagine they'd actually be living into their purpose by then. But it's not so distant that it creates complacency. A goal might be to land a top job—in Richard's case, a global procurement role—but the focus should be on how you will do it, what kind of leader you'll be.

Then he considers *two-year goals*. This is a time frame in which the grand future and current reality begin to merge. What new responsibilities will you take on? What do you have to do to set yourself up for the longer term?

Remember to address your personal life, too, because you should be more fully living into your purpose everywhere. Richard's goals explicitly reference his family, or "shore team."

A PURPOSE-TO-IMPACT PLAN

This sample plan shows how "Richard" uses his unique leadership purpose to envision big-picture aspirations and then work backward to set more-specific goals.

1. Create purpose statement

To harness all the elements to win the race

2. Write explanation

I love to sail. In my teens and twenties, I raced high-performance three-man skiffs and almost made it to the Olympics. Now sailing is my hobby and passion—a challenge that requires discipline, balance, and coordination. You never know what the wind will do next, and in the end, you win the race only by relying on your team's combined capabilities, intuition, and flow. It's all about how you read the elements.

3. Set three- to five-year goals

Be known for training the best crews and winning the big races: Take on a global procurement role, and use the opportunity to push my organization

ahead of competitors

How will I do it?

- Make everyone feel they're part of the same team
- Navigate unpredictable conditions by seeing wind shears before everyone else
- Keep calm when we lose individual races; learn and prepare for the next ones

Celebrate my shore team: Make sure the family has one thing we do that binds us

4. Set two-year goals

Win the gold: Implement a new procurement model, redefining our relationship with suppliers and generating 10% cost savings for the company

Tackle next-level racing challenge: Move into a European role with broader responsibilities

How will I do it?

- Anticipate and then face the tough challenges
- Insist on innovative yet rigorous and pragmatic solutions
- Assemble and train the winning crew

Develop my shore team: Teach the boys to sail

5. Set one-year goals

Target the gold: Begin to develop new procurement process

Win the short race: Deliver Sympix project ahead of expectations

Build a seaworthy boat: Keep TFLS process within cost and cash forecast

How will I do it?

- Accelerate team reconfiguration
- Get buy-in from management for new procurement approach

Invest in my shore team: Take a two-week vacation, no email

6. Map out critical next steps

Assemble the crew: Finalize key hires
Chart the course: Lay the groundwork for Sympix and TFLS projects

How will I do it?

Six months:

- Finalize succession plans
- Set out Sympix timeline

Three months:

- Land a world-class replacement for Jim
- Schedule “action windows” to focus with no email

30 days:

- Bring Alex in Shanghai on board
- Agree on TFLS metrics
- Conduct one-day Sympix off-site

Reconnect with my shore team: Be more present with Jill and the boys

7. Examine key relationships

Sarah, HR manager

Jill, manager of my shore team

The fifth step—setting *one-year goals*—is often the most challenging. Many people ask, “What if most of what I am doing today isn’t aligned in any way with my leadership purpose? How do I get from here to there?” We’ve found two ways to address this problem. First, think about whether you can rewrite the narrative on parts of your work, or change the way you do some tasks, so that they become an expression of your purpose. For example, the phrase “seaworthy boat” helps Richard see the meaning in managing a basic procurement process. Second, consider whether you can add an activity that is 100% aligned with your purpose. We’ve found that most people can manage to devote 5% to 10% of their time to something that energizes

them and helps others see their strengths. Take Richard's decision to contribute to the global strategic procurement effort: It's not part of his "day job," but it gets him involved in a more purpose-driven project.

Now we get to the nitty-gritty. What are the *critical next steps* that you must take in the coming six months, three months, and 30 days to accomplish the one-year goals you've set out? The importance of small wins is well documented in almost every management discipline from change initiatives to innovation. In detailing your next steps, don't write down all the requirements of your job. List the activities or results that are most critical given your newly clarified leadership purpose and ambitions. You'll probably notice that a number of your tasks seem much less urgent than they did before, while others you had pushed to the side take priority.

Finally, we look at the *key relationships* needed to turn your plan into reality. Identify two or three people who can help you live more fully into your leadership purpose. For Richard, it is Sarah, the HR manager who will help him assemble his crew, and his wife, Jill, the manager of his "shore team."

Executives tell us that their individual purpose-to-impact plans help them stay true to their short- and long-term goals, inspiring courage, commitment, and focus. When they're frustrated or flagging, they pull out the plans

to remind themselves what they want to accomplish and how they'll succeed. After creating his plan, the retail operations chief facing global competition said he's no longer "shying away from things that are too hard." Dolf van den Brink said: "I'm much clearer on where I really can contribute and where not. I have full clarity on the kind of roles I aspire to and can make explicit choices along the way." What creates the greatest leaders and companies? Each of them operates from a slightly different set of assumptions about the world, their industry, what can or can't be done. That individual perspective allows them to create great value and have significant impact. They all operate with a unique leadership purpose. To be a truly effective leader, you must do the same. Clarify your purpose, and put it to work.

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Five Questions to Help Your Employees Find Their Inner Purpose

By Kristi Hedges

How can leaders help employees find meaning at work?

Organizations spend considerable resources on corporate values and mission statements, but even the most inspiring of these—from Volvo’s commitment to safety to Facebook’s desire to connect people—tend to fade into the background during the daily bustle of the workday.

What workers really need to feel engaged in and satisfied by their jobs is an inner sense of purpose. As Deloitte found in a 2016 study, people feel loyal to companies that support their own career and life ambitions—in other words, what’s meaningful to them.¹ And, although that research focused on millennials, in the decade I’ve spent coaching seasoned executives, I’ve found that it’s a common attitude across generations. No matter

one's level, industry, or career, we all need to find a personal sense of meaning in what we do.

Leaders can foster this inner sense of purpose—what matters right now, in each individual's life and career—with simple conversation. One technique is action identification theory, which posits that there are many levels of description for any action.² For example, right now I'm writing this article. At a low level, I'm typing words on a keyboard. At a high level, I'm creating better leaders. When leaders walk employees up this ladder, they can help them find meaning in even the most mundane tasks.

Regular check-ins that use five areas of inquiry are another way to help employees explore and call out their inner purpose. Leaders can ask:

What are you good at doing? Which work activities require less effort for you? What do you take on because you believe you're the best person to do it? What have you gotten noticed for throughout your career? The idea here is to help people identify their strengths and open possibilities from there.

What do you enjoy? In a typical workweek, what do you look forward to doing? What do you see on your calendar that energizes you? If you could design your job with no restrictions, how would you spend your

time? These questions help people find or rediscover what they love about work.

What feels most useful? Which work outcomes make you most proud? Which of your tasks are most critical to the team or organization? What are the highest priorities for your life and how does your work fit in? This line of inquiry highlights the inherent value of certain work.

What creates a sense of forward momentum? What are you learning that you'll use in the future? What do you envision for yourself next? How is your work today getting you closer to what you want for yourself? The goal here is to show how today's work helps the individual advance toward future goals.

How do you relate to others? Which working partnerships are best for you? What would an office of your favorite people look like? How does your work enhance your family and social connections? These questions encourage people to think about and foster relationships that make work more meaningful.

It's not easy to guide others toward purpose, but these strategies can help.

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How to Make Work More Meaningful for Your Team

By Lewis Garrad and Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic

There is a well-known story about a janitor at NASA who, when asked by John F. Kennedy what his job was, responded, “I’m helping to put a man on the moon.” This anecdote is often used to show how even the most mundane job can be seen as meaningful with the right mindset and under good leadership.

Today, more and more employees demand much more than a good salary from their jobs. Money may lure people into particular positions, but purpose, meaning, and the prospect of interesting and valuable work determines both their tenure and how hard they will work while they are on the job. Finding meaning at work has become so important that there are even public rankings for the most meaningful jobs.¹ Although there are many factors that determining

how appealing a position tends to be, those that contribute to improving other people's lives (such as those in health care and social work) are ranked at the top. Interestingly, meta-analytic studies indicate that there is only a marginal association between pay and job satisfaction.² By that reasoning, a lawyer who earns \$150,000 a year is no more engaged than a freelance designer who earns \$35,000 a year.

Research consistently shows that people who experience meaningful work report better health, more well-being, and a clearer sense of teamwork and engagement. They bounce back faster from setbacks and are more likely to view mistakes as learning opportunities rather than failures. In other words, people at work who experience their job as meaningful are more likely to thrive and grow. This is why businesses with a stronger and clearer sense of purpose tend to perform better financially. Unsurprisingly, the most successful companies in the world are also the best places in the world to work.³

Over the past few decades, a great deal of research has shown that leaders play a significant role in helping employees understand why their roles matter. Furthermore, the leadership characteristics that enable these cultures of meaning and purpose to engage employees are a reflection of a leader's personality—which

has been proven to have a strong impact on team and organizational performance.⁴

In particular, research suggests that there are four key personality characteristics that determine leaders' ability to make other people's jobs more meaningful, namely:

They are curious and inquisitive. Studies show that people tend to experience work as meaningful when they feel like they are contributing to creating something new—especially when they feel able to explore, connect and have an impact.⁵ Curious leaders help people find meaning at work by exploring, asking questions, and engaging people in ideas about the future. In a way, curious leaders help employees find something meaningful by providing a wider range of possibilities for how work gets done, as opposed to being very prescriptive and micromanaging people. Curious leaders also detest monotony and are more likely to get bored, so they will always be looking for people to come up with new ideas to make their own experience of work more interesting.

They are challenging and relentless. One of the greatest problems organizations must solve is the inertia and stagnation that follow, or even anticipate,

success. Research shows that optimistic people who expect to do well don't try as hard as people who expect to struggle or fail.⁶ Leaders who remain ambitious in the face of both failure and success, and who push their people to remain dissatisfied with their accomplishments, instill a deeper sense of purpose in their teams and organizations. As a result employees feel a sense of progress, reinvention, and growth, which in turn results in a more meaningful and positive work experience.

They hire for values and culture fit. Research shows that people only find something valuable if it aligns with their core needs and motives. This is why the fit between an individual's personal values and the culture of the organization they work in is such an important driver of their performance. In fact, you are better off not hiring the "best" people but instead looking for those who are a good fit for your organization. Values function like an inner compass or lens through which we assign meaning to the world. Leaders who pay attention to what *each* individual values are more likely to hire people who will find it easier to connect with their colleagues and the wider organization, all of which help to drive a sense of meaning.⁷

They are able to trust people. Most individuals hate being micromanaged. Overpowering and controlling bosses are a serious source of disempowerment for employees. They drain the value from the work they do and make employees feel worthless. In stark contrast, leaders who know how to trust people are more likely to give them room to experiment and grow. In particular, they help their employees mold their roles—something researchers call “job crafting.” Employees who customize their job tend to feel a much greater sense of importance and value because they feel that their manager actually trusts them.

Note that all of the above four qualities ought to exist in concert. A boss who is relentless but not trusting might seek to “keep people on their toes” by being erratic or unpredictable—a sure way to hurt performance and morale. A boss who is challenging but not curious may come across as a bully, while a boss who’s trusting but not challenging will seem like a pushover. In short, there is a clear difference between making work meaningful and making it fun or easy, just like there is a big difference between an engaged and a happy employee. Whereas engagement results in enthusiasm, drive, and motivation—all of which increase performance and are therefore valuable to the

organization—happiness can lead to complacency. To be a good leader, focus on helping employees find meaning in their achievements, rather than just enjoy their time at the office.

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The Power of Small Wins

By Teresa M. Amabile and Steven J. Kramer

What is the best way to drive innovative work inside organizations? Important clues hide in the stories of world-renowned creators. It turns out that ordinary scientists, marketers, programmers, and other unsung knowledge workers, whose jobs require creative productivity every day, have more in common with famous innovators than most managers realize. The workday events that ignite their emotions, fuel their motivation, and trigger their perceptions are fundamentally the same.

The Double Helix, James Watson's 1968 memoir about discovering the structure of DNA, describes the roller coaster of emotions he and Francis Crick experienced through the progress and setbacks of the work that eventually earned them the Nobel Prize. After the excitement of their first attempt to build a DNA model, Watson and Crick noticed some serious flaws. According to

Watson, “Our first minutes with the models . . . were not joyous.” Later that evening, “a shape began to emerge which brought back our spirits.” But when they showed their “breakthrough” to colleagues, they found that their model would not work. Dark days of doubt and ebbing motivation followed. When the duo finally had their bona fide breakthrough, and their colleagues found no fault with it, Watson wrote, “My morale skyrocketed, for I suspected that we now had the answer to the riddle.” Watson and Crick were so driven by this success that they practically lived in the lab, trying to complete the work.

Throughout these episodes, Watson and Crick’s progress—or lack thereof—ruled their reactions. In our recent research on creative work inside businesses, we stumbled upon a remarkably similar phenomenon. Through exhaustive analysis of diaries kept by knowledge workers, we discovered the “progress principle”: Of all the things that can boost emotions, motivation, and perceptions during a workday, the single most important is making progress in meaningful work. And the more frequently people experience that sense of progress, the more likely they are to be creatively productive in the long run. Whether they are trying to solve a major scientific mystery or simply produce a high-quality product or service, everyday progress—even a small win—can make all the difference in how they feel and perform.

The power of progress is fundamental to human nature, but few managers understand it or know how to leverage progress to boost motivation. In fact, work motivation has been a subject of long-standing debate. In a survey asking about the keys to motivating workers, we found that some managers ranked recognition for good work as most important, while others put more stock in tangible incentives. Some focused on the value of interpersonal support, while still others thought clear goals were the answer. Interestingly, very few of our surveyed managers ranked progress first. (See the sidebar [“A Surprise for Managers.”](#))

If you are a manager, the progress principle holds clear implications for where to focus your efforts. It suggests that you have more influence than you may realize over employees’ well-being, motivation, and creative output. Knowing what serves to catalyze and nourish progress—and what does the opposite—turns out to be the key to effectively managing people and their work.

In this article, we share what we have learned about the power of progress and how managers can leverage it. We spell out how a focus on progress translates into concrete managerial actions and provide a checklist to help make such behaviors habitual. But to clarify why those actions are so potent, we first describe our research and

what the knowledge workers' diaries revealed about their "inner work lives."

A SURPRISE FOR MANAGERS

In a 1968 issue of HBR, Frederick Herzberg published a now-classic article titled "One More Time: How Do You Motivate Employees?" Our findings are consistent with his message: People are most satisfied with their jobs (and therefore most motivated) when those jobs give them the opportunity to experience achievement. The diary research we describe in this article—in which we microscopically examined the events of thousands of workdays, in real time—uncovered the mechanism underlying the sense of achievement: making consistent, meaningful progress.

But managers seem not to have taken Herzberg's lesson to heart. To assess contemporary awareness of the importance of daily work progress, we recently administered a survey to 669 managers of varying levels from dozens of companies around the world. We asked about the managerial tools that can affect employees' motivation and emotions. The respondents ranked five tools—support for making progress in the work, recognition for good work, incentives, interpersonal support, and clear goals—in order of importance.

Of the managers who took our survey, 95% would probably be surprised to learn that supporting progress is the primary way to elevate motivation—because that's the percentage who failed to rank progress number one. In fact, only 35 managers ranked progress as the number one motivator—a mere 5%. The vast majority of respondents ranked support for making

progress dead last as a motivator and third as an influence on emotion. They ranked “recognition for good work (either public or private)” as the most important factor in motivating workers and making them happy. In our diary study, recognition certainly did boost inner work life. But it wasn’t nearly as prominent as progress. Besides, without work achievements, there is little to recognize.

Inner work life and performance

For nearly 15 years, we have been studying the psychological experiences and the performance of people doing complex work inside organizations. Early on, we realized that a central driver of creative, productive performance was the quality of a person’s inner work life: the mix of emotions, motivations, and perceptions over the course of a workday. How happy workers feel; how motivated they are by an intrinsic interest in the work; how positively they view their organization, their management, their team, their work, and themselves—all these combine either to push them to higher levels of achievement or to drag them down.

To understand such interior dynamics better, we asked members of project teams to respond individually to an end-of-day email survey during the course of the project—just over four months, on average. (For more on this research, see our article “Inner Work Life: Understanding

the Subtext of Business Performance,” HBR, May 2007.) The projects—inventing kitchen gadgets, managing product lines of cleaning tools, and solving complex IT problems for a hotel empire, for example—all involved creativity. The daily survey inquired about participants’ emotions and moods, motivation levels, and perceptions of the work environment that day, as well as what work they did and what events stood out in their minds.

Twenty-six project teams from seven companies participated, comprising 238 individuals. This yielded nearly 12,000 diary entries. Naturally, every individual in our population experienced ups and downs. Our goal was to discover the states of inner work life and the workday events that correlated with the highest levels of creative output.

In a dramatic rebuttal to the commonplace claim that high pressure and fear spur achievement, we found that, at least in the realm of knowledge work, people are more creative and productive when their inner work lives are positive—when they feel happy, are intrinsically motivated by the work itself, and have positive perceptions of their colleagues and the organization. Moreover, in those positive states, people are more committed to the work and more collegial toward those around them. Inner work life, we saw, can fluctuate from one day to the next—sometimes wildly—and performance along with it. A person’s inner

work life on a given day fuels his or her performance for the day and can even affect performance the *next* day.

Once this “inner work-life effect” became clear, our inquiry turned to whether and how managerial action could set it in motion. What events could evoke positive or negative emotions, motivations, and perceptions? The answers were tucked within our research participants’ diary entries. There are predictable triggers that inflate or deflate inner work life, and, even accounting for variation among individuals, they are pretty much the same for everyone.

The power of progress

Our hunt for inner work-life triggers led us to the progress principle. When we compared our research participants’ best and worst days (based on their overall mood, specific emotions, and motivation levels), we found that the most common event triggering a “best day” was any progress in the work by the individual or the team. The most common event triggering a “worst day” was a setback.

Consider, for example, how progress relates to one component of inner work life: overall mood ratings. Steps forward occurred on 76% of people’s best-mood days. By contrast, setbacks occurred on only 13% of those days.

(See the figure “What happens on good days and bad days?”)

Two other types of inner work-life triggers also occur frequently on best days: *catalysts*, actions that directly support work, including help from a person or group, and *nourishers*, events such as shows of respect and words of encouragement. Each has an opposite: *inhibitors*, actions that fail to support or actively hinder work, and *toxins*, discouraging or undermining events. Whereas catalysts and inhibitors are directed at the project, nourishers and toxins are directed at the person. Like setbacks, inhibitors and toxins are rare on days of great inner work life.

Events on worst-mood days are nearly the mirror image of those on best-mood days. Here, setbacks predominated, occurring on 67% of those days; progress occurred on only 25% of them. Inhibitors and toxins also marked many worst-mood days, and catalysts and nourishers were rare.

This is the progress principle made visible: If a person is motivated and happy at the end of a workday, it's a good bet that he or she made some progress. If the person drags out of the office disengaged and joyless, a setback is most likely to blame.

When we analyzed all 12,000 daily surveys filled out by our participants, we discovered that progress and setbacks influence all three aspects of inner work life. On days when they made progress, our participants reported more

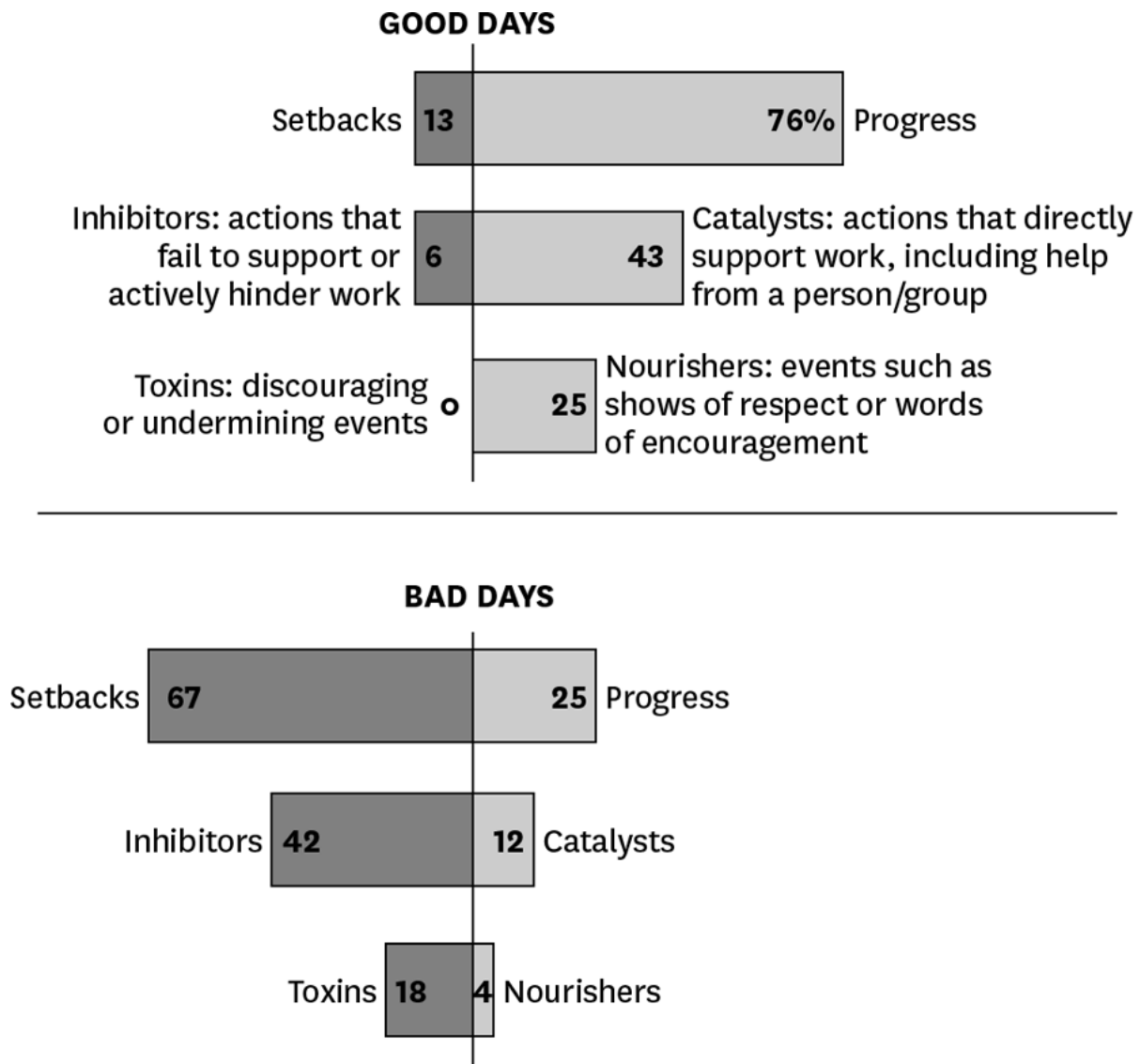
positive *emotions*. They not only were in a more upbeat mood in general but also expressed more joy, warmth, and pride. When they suffered setbacks, they experienced more frustration, fear, and sadness.

Motivations were also affected: On progress days, people were more intrinsically motivated—by interest in and enjoyment of the work itself. On setback days, they were not only less intrinsically motivated but also less extrinsically motivated by recognition. Apparently, setbacks can lead a person to feel generally apathetic and disinclined to do the work at all.

Perceptions differed in many ways, too. On progress days, people perceived significantly more positive challenge in their work. They saw their teams as more mutually supportive and reported more positive interactions between the teams and their supervisors. On a number of dimensions, perceptions suffered when people encountered setbacks. They found less positive challenge in the work, felt that they had less freedom in carrying it out, and reported that they had insufficient resources. On setback days, participants perceived both their teams and their supervisors as less supportive.

What happens on good days and bad days?

Progress—even a small step forward—occurs on many of the days people report being in a good mood. Events on bad days—setbacks and other hindrances—are nearly the mirror image of those on good days.



To be sure, our analyses establish correlations but do not prove causality. Were these changes in inner work life the result of progress and setbacks, or was the effect the

other way around? The numbers alone cannot answer that. However, we do know, from reading thousands of diary entries, that more-positive perceptions, a sense of accomplishment, satisfaction, happiness, and even elation often followed progress. Here's a typical post-progress entry, from a programmer: "I smashed that bug that's been frustrating me for almost a calendar week. That may not be an event to you, but I live a very drab life, so I'm all hyped."

Likewise, we saw that deteriorating perceptions, frustration, sadness, and even disgust often followed setbacks. As another participant, a product marketer, wrote, "We spent a lot of time updating the cost reduction project list, and after tallying all the numbers, we are still coming up short of our goal. It is discouraging to not be able to hit it after all the time spent and hard work."

Almost certainly, the causality goes both ways, and managers can use this feedback loop between progress and inner work life to support both.

Minor milestones

When we think about progress, we often imagine how good it feels to achieve a long-term goal or experience a major breakthrough. These big wins are great—but they are relatively rare. The good news is that even small wins can boost inner work life tremendously. Many of the progress

events our research participants reported represented only minor steps forward. Yet they often evoked outsize positive reactions. Consider this diary entry from a programmer in a high-tech company, which was accompanied by very positive self-ratings of her emotions, motivations, and perceptions that day: “I figured out why something was not working correctly. I felt relieved and happy because this was a minor milestone for me.”

Even ordinary, incremental progress can increase people’s engagement in the work and their happiness during the workday. Across all the types of events our participants reported, a notable proportion (28%) that had a minor impact on the project had a major impact on people’s feelings about it. Because inner work life has such a potent effect on creativity and productivity, and because small but consistent steps forward shared by many people can accumulate into excellent execution, progress events that often go unnoticed are critical to the overall performance of organizations.

Unfortunately, there is a flip side. Small losses or setbacks can have an extremely negative effect on inner work life. In fact, our study and research by others show that negative events can have a more powerful impact than positive ones. Consequently, it is especially important for managers to minimize daily hassles. (See again the figure [“What happens on good days and bad days?”](#))

Progress in meaningful work

We've shown how gratifying it is for workers when they are able to chip away at a goal, but recall what we said earlier: The key to motivating performance is supporting progress in *meaningful* work. Making headway boosts your inner work life, but only if the work matters to you.

Think of the most boring job you've ever had. Many people nominate their first job as a teenager—washing pots and pans in a restaurant kitchen, for example, or checking coats at a museum. In jobs like those, the power of progress seems elusive. No matter how hard you work, there are always more pots to wash and coats to check; only punching the time clock at the end of the day or getting the paycheck at the end of the week yields a sense of accomplishment.

In jobs with much more challenge and room for creativity, like the ones our research participants had, simply “making progress”—getting tasks done—doesn't guarantee a good inner work life, either. You may have experienced this rude fact in your own job, on days (or in projects) when you felt demotivated, devalued, and frustrated, even though you worked hard and got things done. The likely cause is your perception of the completed tasks as peripheral or irrelevant. For the progress principle

to operate, the work must be meaningful to the person doing it.

In 1983, Steve Jobs was trying to entice John Sculley to leave a wildly successful career at PepsiCo to become Apple's new CEO. Jobs reportedly asked him, "Do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water or do you want a chance to change the world?" In making his pitch, Jobs leveraged a potent psychological force: the deep-seated human desire to do meaningful work.

Fortunately, to feel meaningful, work doesn't have to involve putting the first personal computers in the hands of ordinary people, or alleviating poverty, or helping to cure cancer. Work with less profound importance to society can matter if it contributes value to something or someone important to the worker. Meaning can be as simple as making a useful and high-quality product for a customer or providing a genuine service for a community. It can be supporting a colleague or boosting an organization's profits by reducing inefficiencies in a production process. Whether the goals are lofty or modest, as long as they are meaningful to the worker and it is clear how his or her efforts contribute to them, progress toward them can galvanize inner work life.

In principle, managers shouldn't have to go to extraordinary lengths to infuse jobs with meaning. Most jobs in modern organizations are potentially meaningful for

the people doing them. However, managers can make sure that employees know just how their work is contributing. And, most important, they can avoid actions that negate its value. (See the sidebar “[How Work Gets Stripped of Its Meaning](#).”) All the participants in our research were doing work that should have been meaningful; no one was washing pots or checking coats. Shockingly often, however, we saw potentially important, challenging work losing its power to inspire.

HOW WORK GETS STRIPPED OF ITS MEANING

Diary entries from 238 knowledge workers who were members of creative project teams revealed four primary ways in which managers unwittingly drain work of its meaning.

Managers may dismiss the importance of employees’ work or ideas.

Consider the case of Richard, a senior lab technician at a chemical company, who found meaning in helping his new-product development team solve complex technical problems. However, in team meetings over the course of a three-week period, Richard perceived that his team leader was ignoring his suggestions and those of his teammates. As a result, he felt that his contributions were not meaningful, and his spirits flagged. When at last he believed that he was again making a substantive contribution to the success of the project, his mood improved dramatically: “I felt much better at today’s team meeting. I felt that my opinions and information were important to the project and that we have made some progress.”

They may destroy employees' sense of ownership of their work.

Frequent and abrupt reassignments often have this effect. This happened repeatedly to the members of a product development team in a giant consumer products company, as described by team member Bruce: "As I've been handing over some projects, I do realize that I don't like to give them up. Especially when you have been with them from the start and are nearly to the end. You lose ownership. This happens to us way too often."

Managers may send the message that the work employees are doing will never see the light of day. They can signal this—unintentionally—by shifting their priorities or changing their minds about how something should be done. We saw the latter in an internet technology company after user-interface developer Burt had spent weeks designing seamless transitions for non-English-speaking users. Not surprisingly, Burt's mood was seriously marred on the day he reported this incident: "Other options for the international [interfaces] were [given] to the team during a team meeting, which could render the work I am doing useless."

They may neglect to inform employees about unexpected changes in a customer's priorities. Often, this arises from poor customer management or inadequate communication within the company. For example, Stuart, a data transformation expert at an IT company, reported deep frustration and low motivation on the day he learned that weeks of the team's hard work might have been for naught: "Found out that there is a strong possibility that the project may not be going forward, due to a shift in the client's agenda. Therefore, there is a strong possibility that all the time and effort put into the project was a waste of our time."

Supporting progress: catalysts and nourishers

What can managers do to ensure that people are motivated, committed, and happy? How can they support workers' daily progress? They can use catalysts and nourishers, the other kinds of frequent "best day" events we discovered.

Catalysts are actions that support work. They include setting clear goals, allowing autonomy, providing sufficient resources and time, helping with the work, openly learning from problems and successes, and allowing a free exchange of ideas. Their opposites, inhibitors, include failing to provide support and actively interfering with the work. Because of their impact on progress, catalysts and inhibitors ultimately affect inner work life. But they also have a more immediate impact: When people realize that they have clear and meaningful goals, sufficient resources, helpful colleagues, and so on, they get an instant boost to their emotions, their motivation to do a great job, and their perceptions of the work and the organization.

Nourishers are acts of interpersonal support, such as respect and recognition, encouragement, emotional comfort, and opportunities for affiliation. Toxins, their opposites, include disrespect, discouragement, disregard for emotions, and interpersonal conflict. For good and for

ill, nourishers and toxins affect inner work life directly and immediately.

Catalysts and nourishers—and their opposites—can alter the meaningfulness of work by shifting people's perceptions of their jobs and even themselves. For instance, when a manager makes sure that people have the resources they need, it signals to them that what they are doing is important and valuable. When managers recognize people for the work they do, it signals that they are important to the organization. In this way, catalysts and nourishers can lend greater meaning to the work—and amplify the operation of the progress principle.

The managerial actions that constitute catalysts and nourishers are not particularly mysterious; they may sound like Management 101, if not just common sense and common decency. But our diary study reminded us how often they are ignored or forgotten. Even some of the more attentive managers in the companies we studied did not consistently provide catalysts and nourishers. For example, a supply chain specialist named Michael was, in many ways and on most days, an excellent subteam manager. But he was occasionally so overwhelmed that he became toxic toward his people. When a supplier failed to complete a “hot” order on time and Michael's team had to resort to air shipping to meet the customer's deadline, he realized that the profit margin on the sale would be blown. In irritation,

he lashed out at his subordinates, demeaning the solid work they had done and disregarding their own frustration with the supplier. In his diary, he admitted as much: “As of Friday, we have spent \$28,000 in air freight to send 1,500 \$30 spray jet mops to our number two customer. Another 2,800 remain on this order, and there is a good probability that they too will gain wings. I have turned from the kindly supply chain manager into the black-masked executioner. All similarity to civility is gone, our backs are against the wall, flight is not possible, therefore fight is probable.”

Even when managers don’t have their backs against the wall, developing long-term strategy and launching new initiatives can often seem more important—and perhaps sexier—than making sure subordinates have what they need to make steady progress and feel supported as human beings. But as we saw repeatedly in our research, even the best strategy will fail if managers ignore the people working in the trenches to execute it.

A model manager—and a tool for emulating him

We could explain the many (and largely unsurprising) moves that can catalyze progress and nourish spirits, but it may be more useful to give an example of a manager who consistently used those moves—and then to provide a simple tool that can help any manager do so.

Our model manager is Graham, whom we observed leading a small team of chemical engineers within a multinational European firm we'll call Kruger-Bern. The mission of the team's NewPoly project was clear and meaningful enough: Develop a safe, biodegradable polymer to replace petrochemicals in cosmetics and, eventually, in a wide range of consumer products. As in many large firms however, the project was nested in a confusing and sometimes threatening corporate setting of shifting top-management priorities, conflicting signals, and wavering commitments. Resources were uncomfortably tight, and uncertainty loomed over the project's future—and every team member's career. Even worse, an incident early in the project, in which an important customer reacted angrily to a sample, left the team reeling. Yet Graham was able to sustain team members' inner work lives by repeatedly and visibly removing obstacles, materially supporting progress, and emotionally supporting the team.

Graham's management approach excelled in four ways. First, he established a positive climate, one event at a time, which set behavioral norms for the entire team. When the customer complaint stopped the project in its tracks, for example, he engaged immediately with the team to analyze the problem, without recriminations, and develop a plan for repairing the relationship. In doing so, he modeled how to respond to crises in the work: not by panicking or pointing

fingers but by identifying problems and their causes and developing a coordinated action plan. This is both a practical approach and a great way to give subordinates a sense of forward movement even in the face of the missteps and failures inherent in any complex project.

Second, Graham stayed attuned to his team's everyday activities and progress. In fact, the nonjudgmental climate he had established made this happen naturally. Team members updated him frequently—without being asked—on their setbacks, progress, and plans. At one point, one of his hardest-working colleagues, Brady, had to abort a trial of a new material because he couldn't get the parameters right on the equipment. It was bad news, because the NewPoly team had access to the equipment only one day a week, but Brady immediately informed Graham. In his diary entry that evening, Brady noted, "He didn't like the lost week but seemed to understand." That understanding assured Graham's place in the stream of information that would allow him to give his people just what they needed to make progress.

Third, Graham targeted his support according to recent events in the team and the project. Each day, he could anticipate what type of intervention—a catalyst or the removal of an inhibitor; a nourisher or some antidote to a toxin—would have the most impact on team members' inner work lives and progress. And if he could not make

that judgment, he asked. Most days it was not hard to figure out, as on the day he received some uplifting news about his bosses' commitment to the project. He knew the team was jittery about a rumored corporate reorganization and could use the encouragement. Even though the clarification came during a well-earned vacation day, he immediately got on the phone to relay the good news to the team.

Finally, Graham established himself as a resource for team members rather than a micromanager; he was sure to check in while never seeming to check *up* on them. Superficially, checking in and checking up seem quite similar, but micromanagers make four kinds of mistakes. First, they fail to allow autonomy in carrying out the work. Unlike Graham, who gave the NewPoly team a clear strategic goal but respected members' ideas about how to meet it, micromanagers dictate every move. Second, they frequently ask subordinates about their work without providing any real help. By contrast, when one of Graham's team members reported problems, Graham helped analyze them—remaining open to alternative interpretations—and often ended up helping to get things back on track. Third, micromanagers are quick to affix personal blame when problems arise, leading subordinates to hide problems rather than honestly discuss how to surmount them, as Graham did with Brady. And fourth, micromanagers tend to

hoard information to use as a secret weapon. Few realize how damaging this is to inner work life. When subordinates perceive that a manager is withholding potentially useful information, they feel infantilized, their motivation wanes, and their work is handicapped. Graham was quick to communicate upper management's views of the project, customers' opinions and needs, and possible sources of assistance or resistance within and outside the organization.

In all those ways, Graham sustained his team's positive emotions, intrinsic motivation, and favorable perceptions. His actions serve as a powerful example of how managers at any level can approach each day determined to foster progress.

We know that many managers, however well-intentioned, will find it hard to establish the habits that seemed to come so naturally to Graham. Awareness, of course, is the first step. However, turning an awareness of the importance of inner work life into routine action takes discipline. With that in mind, we developed a checklist for managers to consult on a daily basis (see the sidebar "[The Daily Progress Checklist](#)"). The aim of the checklist is managing for meaningful progress, one day at a time.

The progress loop

Inner work life drives performance; in turn, good performance, which depends on consistent progress, enhances inner work life. We call this the “progress loop”—it reveals the potential for self-reinforcing benefits.

So, the most important implication of the progress principle is this: By supporting people and their daily progress in meaningful work, managers improve not only the inner work lives of their employees but also the organization’s long-term performance, which enhances inner work life even more. Of course, there is a dark side—the possibility of negative feedback loops. If managers fail to support progress and the people trying to make it, inner work life suffers and so does performance; and degraded performance further undermines inner work life.

A second implication of the progress principle is that managers needn’t fret about trying to read the psyches of their workers or manipulate complicated incentive schemes to ensure that employees are motivated and happy. As long as managers show basic respect and consideration, they can focus on supporting the work itself.

To become an effective manager, you must learn to set this positive feedback loop in motion. That may require a significant shift. Business schools, business books, and managers themselves usually focus on managing organizations or people. But if you focus on managing progress, the management of people—and even of entire

organizations—becomes much more feasible. You won't have to figure out how to x-ray the inner work lives of subordinates; if you facilitate their steady progress in meaningful work, make that progress salient to them, and treat them well, they will experience the emotions, motivations, and perceptions necessary for great performance. Their superior work will contribute to organizational success. And here's the beauty of it: They will love their jobs.

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THE DAILY PROGRESS CHECKLIST

Near the end of each workday, use this checklist to review the day and plan your managerial actions for the next day. After a few days, you will be able to identify issues by scanning the boldface words.

First, focus on progress and setbacks and think about specific events (catalysts, nourishers, inhibitors, and toxins) that contributed to them. Next, consider any clear inner-work-life clues and what further information they provide about progress and other events. Finally, prioritize for action.

The action plan for the next day is the most important part of your daily review: What is the one thing you can do to best facilitate progress?

Progress

Which 1 or 2 events today indicated either a small win or a possible breakthrough? (Describe briefly.)

Catalysts

- ☐ Did the team have clear short- and long-term **goals** for meaningful work?
- ☐ Did team members have sufficient **autonomy** to solve problems and take ownership of the project?
- ☐ Did they have all the **resources** they needed to move forward efficiently?
- ☐ Did they have sufficient **time** to focus on meaningful work?

- ☐ Did I discuss **lessons** from today's successes and problems with my team?
- ☐ Did I give or get them **help** when they needed or requested it? Did I encourage team members to help one another?
- ☐ Did I help **ideas** flow freely within the group?

Nourishers

- ☐ Did I show **respect** to team members by recognizing their contributions to progress, attending to their ideas, and treating them as trusted professionals?
- ☐ Did I **encourage** team members who faced difficult challenges?
- ☐ Did I **support** team members who had a personal or professional problem?
- ☐ Is there a sense of personal and professional **affiliation** and camaraderie within the team?

Setbacks

Which 1 or 2 events today indicated either a small setback or a possible crisis? (Describe briefly.)

Inhibitors

- ☐ Was there any confusion regarding long- or short-term **goals** for meaningful work?
- ☐ Were team members overly **constrained** in their ability to solve problems and feel ownership of the project?
- ☐ Did they lack any of the **resources** they needed to move forward effectively?
- ☐ Did they lack sufficient **time** to focus on meaningful work?
- ☐ Did I or others fail to provide needed or requested **help**?
- ☐ Did I “punish” failure or neglect to find **lessons** and/or opportunities in problems and successes?
- ☐ Did I or others cut off the presentation or debate of **ideas** prematurely?

Toxins

- ☐ Did I **disrespect** any team members by failing to recognize their contributions to progress, not attending to their ideas, or not treating them as trusted professionals?
- ☐ Did I **discourage** a member of the team in any way?
- ☐ Did I **neglect** a team member who had a personal or professional problem?
- ☐ Is there tension or **antagonism** among members of the team or between team members and me?

Inner work life

- Did I see any indications of the quality of my subordinates' inner work lives today?

- Perceptions of the work, team, management, firm

- Emotions

- Motivation

- What specific events might have affected inner work life today?

Action plan

- What can I do tomorrow to strengthen the catalysts and nourishers identified and provide the ones that are lacking?

- What can I do tomorrow to start eliminating the inhibitors and toxins identified?



The Founder of TOMS on Reimagining the Company's Mission

By Blake Mycoskie

In the fall of 2012 I did something I never thought I'd do: I took a sabbatical from TOMS. It was not your typical travel-the-world sabbatical. My wife, Heather, and I moved to Austin, Texas, where I'd grown up, and I used the physical and psychological separation from the company to do some soul-searching.

In the six years since I'd founded TOMS, it had grown from a startup based in my Venice, California, apartment to a global company with more than \$300 million in revenue. I still owned 100% of it, and we were still delivering on our promise to give a pair of shoes to someone in need for every pair sold, but I felt disillusioned. My days were monotonous, and I had lost my connection to many of the

executives who were running daily operations. What had once been my reason for being now felt like a job.

During my months away, I did a lot of thinking about my personal “why.” I knew why I had started the company and why people joined me in the early days. And I still believed in our mission and the impact we were making. But I was no longer sure why I wanted—or even if I did want—to continue driving the business forward.

Eventually I came to a surprising conclusion: I felt lost because TOMS had become more focused on process than on purpose. We were concentrating so hard on the “what” and “how” of scaling up that we’d forgotten our overarching mission, which is to use business to improve lives. That is our greatest competitive advantage: It allows us to build an emotional bond with customers and motivate employees, because they know they are shopping and working for a movement bigger than themselves.

After my time away from the business, I returned with renewed energy. My mission was clear: Make TOMS a movement again.

The company’s genesis

I got the idea for TOMS on something like a sabbatical. After founding and selling several companies (a door-to-door laundry business, an outdoor advertising company, an

online driver's education service) and making a brief detour into reality TV (I competed on *The Amazing Race* with my sister and created an all-reality cable channel), I decided to take some time off in 2006 to learn to play polo in Argentina. I know that sounds like a strange mix of pursuits, but I've always been happiest chasing my latest interest.

While in Buenos Aires, I met a woman who worked for a nonprofit, delivering shoes to children in poor rural areas. She invited me to accompany her, and the experience was truly life changing. In every town we were greeted with cheers and tears. I met a pair of brothers, ages 10 and 12, who had been sharing a single pair of adult-size shoes. Because the local schools required footwear, they had to take turns going to class. Their mother wept when I handed her shoes that actually fit her boys' feet. I couldn't believe that such a simple act could have such an enormous impact on people's lives.

I decided to do something more. Rather than go home and ask my friends to donate their hand-me-downs or make financial contributions, I would start a for-profit company based on the buy-one, give-one idea. I named it Shoes for Tomorrow, later shortened to Tomorrow's Shoes, and finally to TOMS so that the name would fit on the little tag on our shoes. (To this day, some people are puzzled when

they meet me, because they're expecting a guy named Tom.)

My polo instructor, Alejo, and I persuaded a local shoemaker to help us make a more fashionable version of the *alpargata*, a canvas shoe worn by Argentines for a century. To borrow a term from Eric Ries's *The Lean Startup*, our first shoes were a "minimum viable product." They had glue stains on them, were in Argentine rather than U.S. sizes, and didn't always fit the same from pair to pair. But they were just good enough to test the concept among my friends in Los Angeles. My goal was to sell 250 pairs so that I could give away 250 pairs in Argentina.

Back home, I hosted a dinner party for some women friends to get their advice. They loved the shoes and were even more excited when I shared my vision of helping children in need. They suggested a number of local boutiques that might serve as retail outlets, so I went to one of them, American Rag, and asked to speak with the shoe buyer. I knew my shoes couldn't compete on quality or price alone, so I told the buyer why I wanted to sell them and give them away. The store became our first retail account.

On a Saturday morning soon after that, I woke up to find my BlackBerry vibrating. At the time, the TOMS website was set to email my phone every time we made a sale. Usually it was just family and friends placing orders,

and the occasional buzzing was a nice surprise. But on this day the phone kept buzzing . . . and buzzing . . . and buzzing. At brunch I started flipping through the *Los Angeles Times* and saw that what I'd expected would be a short piece by its fashion writer on TOMS had landed on the front page of the Calendar section. By the end of the day we had sold 2,200 pairs of shoes. This was incredible—but it was also the company's first supply-chain management challenge. We had fewer than 200 pairs in my apartment.

Over the next six months I worked with a team of interns to turn my “shoe project” into a real company. We received a flood of additional press from *Vogue*, *People*, *Time*, *Elle*. Soon celebrities such as Tobey Maguire, Keira Knightley, and Scarlett Johansson were being photographed wearing TOMS. Nordstrom insisted on carrying our shoes. By the end of the summer we had sold 10,000 pairs. The “why” of TOMS was clearly resonating.

Disillusionment

By 2011 TOMS had an annual growth rate (for five years running) of 300%, and we'd recently given away our 10 millionth pair of shoes. The one-for-one model—initially dismissed by traditional businesspeople as nice but not financially sustainable—was clearly a success, and we'd

decided to extend it to eyewear, giving away pairs of glasses or medical treatments to restore sight for pairs sold. We had set ourselves apart in other ways, too: A third of our revenue was coming from direct-to-consumer sales via our website, and we spent virtually nothing on traditional advertising, relying instead on our 5 million social media followers to create word-of-mouth buzz.

In September 2012 Heather and I got married. I'd brought in an experienced team of executives to manage the day-to-day operations, and for the first time since founding the business, I felt I could take a break from it. I was relieved but also deeply unsettled. The excitement and camaraderie of our startup was beginning to be replaced by a more hierarchical culture. The leadership team was bogged down in personality conflicts and bickering, with key members insisting that we implement processes and systems similar to those used at their previous companies. As an organization, we were so focused on protecting what we'd already built that no one was thinking about new possibilities. I noticed that longtime employees were starting to leave for more-entrepreneurial organizations, and I realized that, secretly, I wanted to follow them.

I'd started and sold companies before—but TOMS was different. It was more than a company to me: It was my life. So this period of uncertainty felt like having problems in a marriage. You thought you'd found your business soul

mate, but you're not in love anymore. What do you do? For me, the sabbatical was like going into couples counseling. I wasn't walking away; I was putting in the work to see if TOMS and I could reconcile. If it had been a pure business problem, I would have organized a strategic offsite. But this was both corporate and personal. I needed to figure out the future course of the company and my role in it. And I tend to do my best thinking alone.

When I left for Austin, I was careful not to make a big deal of it—I told people the break was an extended honeymoon with Heather. But once there, I dedicated a lot of time to private contemplation. I also started talking to anyone I thought might offer good advice and inspire me. I spoke regularly with my executive coach, entrepreneur friends, and business and nonprofit leaders I admire. I traveled to conferences around the country to learn from experts in social enterprise and international development.

It was during this time that I read Simon Sinek's fantastic book *Start with Why*, which looks at leaders who inspire action, such as Martin Luther King Jr., and companies, such as Apple, that create products so compelling that fans will line up to buy them. Sinek argues that one can build and sustain these movements only when leading with the "why." People follow you, buy from you, when they believe what you believe.

The more I thought about this idea, the more I realized that TOMS had veered away from its “why.” In the early days we always led with our story: We weren’t selling shoes; we were selling the promise that each purchase would directly and tangibly benefit a child who needed shoes. But our desire to sustain the company’s hypergrowth had pushed us away from that mission and into competing on the “what” and “how,” just as every other shoe company does. In an effort to meet aggressive sales goals, we had begun promoting deals and discounts on our website—something we’d never done before. Our marketing increasingly felt product focused rather than purpose focused. And as the leader of TOMS, I was ultimately accountable for those mistakes. That was a tough pill to swallow.

Another breakthrough came during a Dallas Cowboys game. I was introduced to a man named Joe Ford, who told me that his son, Scott, was also using business to improve lives, but through the coffee trade in Rwanda. Joe explained the importance of water in the coffee supply chain. When beans are processed with clean as opposed to dirty water, they are transformed from a commodity to a specialty and can be sold at dramatically higher prices. Scott’s company, Westrock Coffee, was helping Rwandan growers build community-owned washing stations to increase the value of their product and to prevent the spread of waterborne

disease. It was also buying direct from growers, helping to break up unfair industry price controls, and offering low-interest loans as an alternative to those from predatory lenders. Best of all, Westrock was a profitable business that sold fantastic coffee.

After meeting Scott, I realized that a TOMS coffee venture could have a real impact—and maybe lift me out of the funk I was in. Like most entrepreneurs, I get a high from starting things and doing the unexpected. No one doubted our shoe business anymore, but few people would imagine that we could also sell coffee. And the expansion could pave the way for a new TOMS retail experience, something I had long wanted to try. We could create cafés and use them as community gathering places to share ideas, get inspired, and connect guests with the “why” of TOMS. The vision—and the challenge—pumped new life into me.

I told our senior executives about my idea. Like TOMS Shoes, TOMS Roasting would have a one-for-one model: For every bag of coffee we sold, we would provide a week’s worth of water to a person in need. When they gave me the green light, I quickly assembled a small team of TOMS employees to get the project (code-named “Burlap”) off the ground. I was still living in Austin, but the more I discussed my plans with Heather (an early TOMS employee who knew the business—and me—better than most people), the more

she realized it was time for my sabbatical to end. We'd just bought a house, and we had a great group of friends, but in early 2013 she said to me, "Blake, we need to move back to L.A." If I was going to fully recommit to TOMS, it couldn't happen from afar.

The reentry

Coming back was great, but I quickly made some of the classic mistakes that founders do upon rejoining their companies. First, when I outlined my vision for using the coffee business to reinspire the "why" of TOMS, I did so without a fully thought-out plan. That made some of my coworkers anxious. Second, I asked the company's CMO to step down so that I could take over brand marketing and communications, which I considered to be key pieces of our new direction—not only for integrating the new business but also for reigniting the passion of our customers. But I quickly realized that I'm better in the founder's role—setting the vision and traveling the country to communicate it, not running marketing or any other department.

Despite these hiccups, by the end of 2013 we had launched the coffee business nationally in Whole Foods stores, opened up three of our own cafés, and started exploring international expansion. To date we have provided more than 175,000 weeks of clean drinking water

to people in need around the world. The new product generated a ton of PR and got our customers excited about TOMS again. But most important, I believe, it gave our employees permission to think bigger, to challenge the status quo, and to reconnect with the mission of the business.

It also got me thinking bigger. I realized that my ultimate aim was to create the most influential, inspirational company in the world, which would be possible only with more help. I decided to meet with private equity firms that had a track record of helping entrepreneurial companies into the next stage of growth, and after a thorough search, I sold 50% of TOMS to Bain Capital in mid-2014. We clearly defined my role and responsibilities and agreed to hire a world-class CEO.

The man we found, Jim Alling, embodies the core values of TOMS. Although he scratched his head a bit over the “coffee decision” (he spent much of his career in senior roles at Starbucks), he understood what the move represented. Creating TOMS Roasting wasn’t an attempt to compete with big chains but, rather, a bold move to reengage with the community and help more people. Over the past year Jim has brought great stability and strategic thinking to the business. We now also sell handbags to fund safe births for mothers and babies in need and backpacks to support anti-bullying programs.

As TOMS approaches its 10th anniversary, I feel more energized and committed than ever. As far as we've come, I still see tremendous opportunities to grow our movement. The "why" of TOMS—using business to improve lives—is bigger than myself, the shoes we sell, or any future products we might launch. It took going on a sabbatical to realize the power of what we've created—and the best way for me to move it forward. Now that I have a clear purpose and amazing partners supporting me, I'm ready for the company's next 10 years and the many adventures ahead.

BLAKE MYCOSKIE is the founder and chief shoe giver of TOMS.

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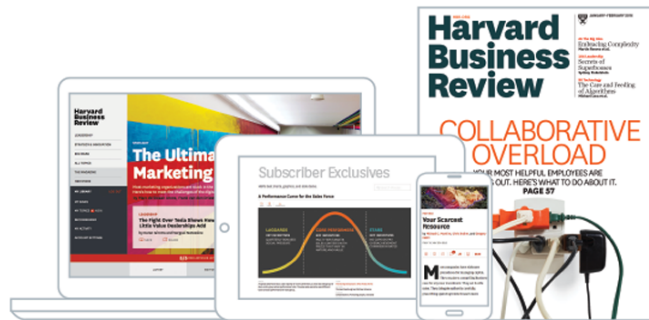
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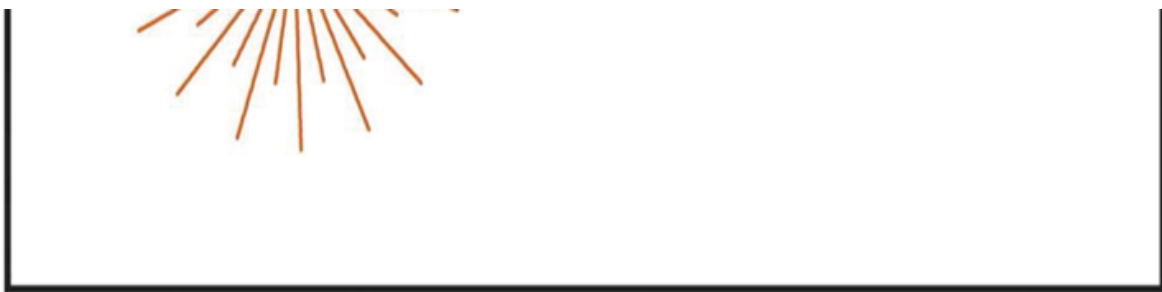




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Happiness

HBR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE SERIES

Happiness Isn't the Absence of Negative Feelings

By Jennifer Moss

Happiness feels intolerably elusive for many of us. Like fog, you can see it from afar, dense and full of shape. But upon approach, its particles loosen, and suddenly it becomes out of reach, even though it's all around you.

We put so much emphasis on the pursuit of happiness, but if you stop and think about it, to pursue is to chase something without a guarantee of ever catching it.

Up until about six years ago, I was fervently and ineffectively chasing happiness. My husband, Jim, and I were living in San Jose, California, with our two-year-old son and a second baby on the way. On paper, our life appeared rosy. Still, I couldn't seem to find the joy. I always felt so guilty about my sadness. My problems were embarrassingly "first world."

Then in September 2009, my world tilted. Jim fell severely ill. He was diagnosed with Swine Flu (H1N1) and West Nile virus, then Guillain-Barré Syndrome, due to his compromised immune system.

Jim never worried about death. I did.

When we were told Jim's illness was letting up, that he'd won this round, we were relieved. When we were told Jim might not walk for some time—likely a year, maybe longer—we were alarmed. We knew this prognosis meant the end of Jim's career as a pro lacrosse player. What we didn't know was how we'd pay the medical bills or how much energy Jim would have for parenting.

With 10 weeks to go until the baby arrived, I had very little time to think and reflect. Jim, on the other hand, *only* had time. He was used to moving at high speeds, both in life and on the field, so minutes passed like hours in the hospital. He was kept busy with physical and occupational therapy, but he was also in need of psychological support.

He put out a note to people in his social networks, asking them for reading suggestions that would help him to mentally heal. Suggestions flowed in. Books and audio tapes were delivered bedside with notes about how they'd "helped so much" after whatever difficulty this person had also experienced but overcame.

Jim would spend his days reading motivational books from Tony Robbins and Oprah or watching TED talks, like

Jill Bolte Taylor's "My Stroke of Insight," about the impacts of brain trauma. He would analyze spiritual books by Deepak Chopra and the Dalai Lama. Or review scientific research papers about happiness and gratitude written by researchers Martin Seligman, Shawn Achor, Sonja Lyubomirsky, and many others.

There was a repeated theme throughout all the literature—gratitude. It would weave in and out of the science, the true stories, and the drivers for success. Jim responded by starting a gratitude journal of his own. He got very thankful—thankful for the people who changed his sheets, thankful for the family that would bring him hot meals at dinner. Thankful for the nurse who would encourage him and thankful for the extra attention his rehab team would give him on their own time. (The team once told Jim that they were only putting in extra time because they knew how grateful he was for their efforts.)

He asked that I participate in his approach, and because I wanted to help him to heal so badly and I was seeing how hard it was for him, I tried hard to be in a positive place when I came into his world inside that hospital room. I wasn't always at my best. I sometimes resented that I couldn't break down—but after a while I started to see how rapidly he was getting better. And although our paths weren't congruent, we were making it work. I was "coming around."

It was shaky and scary, but when Jim walked out of the hospital on crutches (he stubbornly refused the wheelchair) only six weeks after he was rushed by ambulance to the ER, we decided there was something more to his healing than just dumb luck.

One of those early books that influenced Jim was Seligman's *Flourish*. A psychologist and former president of the American Psychology Association, Seligman was responsible for defining the term "PERMA," the root of many positive psychology research projects around the world. The acronym stands for the five elements essential to lasting contentment:

- *Positive emotion*: Peace, gratitude, satisfaction, pleasure, inspiration, hope, curiosity, and love fall into this category.
- *Engagement*: Losing ourselves in a task or project provides us with a sense of "disappeared time" because we are so highly engaged.
- *Relationships*: People who have meaningful, positive relationships with others are happier than those who do not.
- *Meaning*: Meaning comes from serving a cause bigger than ourselves. Whether it's a religion or a cause that

helps humanity in some way, we all need meaning in our lives.

- *Accomplishment/achievement*: To feel significant life satisfaction, we must strive to better ourselves.

We slowly brought these five tenets back into our lives. Jim returned to Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario to research neuroscience, and we promptly started up Plasticity Labs to help teach others what we'd learned about the pursuit of happiness. As our lives came to include more empathy, gratitude, and meaning, I stopped feeling sad.

So when I see skepticism directed at the positive psychology movement, I take it personally. Do these critics have a problem with gratitude? Relationships? Meaning? Hope?

Perhaps part of the problem is that we oversimplify happiness in our pop culture and media, which makes it easy to discard as unproven. As Vanessa Buote, a postdoctoral fellow in social psychology, put it to me in an email:

One of the misconceptions about happiness is that happiness is being cheerful, joyous, and content all the time; always having a smile on your face. It's not—being happy and leading rich lives is about taking the

good with the bad, and learning how to reframe the bad. In fact, in the recent [article in the Journal of Experimental Psychology], “Emodiversity and the Emotional Ecosystem,” by Harvard [researcher Jordi] Quoidbach, found that experiencing a wide range of emotions—both positive and negative—was linked to positive mental and physical well-being.

Not only do we tend to misunderstand what happiness is, we also tend to chase it the wrong way. Shawn Achor, the researcher and corporate trainer who wrote the HBR article “Positive Intelligence,” told me that most people think about happiness the wrong way: “The biggest misconception of the happiness industry is that happiness is an end, not a means. We think that if we get what we want, then we’ll be happy. But it turns out that our brains actually work in the opposite direction.”

Buote agrees: “We sometimes tend to see ‘being happy’ as the end goal, but we forget that what’s really important is the journey; finding out what makes us the happiest and regularly engaging in those activities to help us lead a more fulfilling life.”

In other words, we’re not happy when we’re chasing happiness. We’re happiest when we’re not thinking about it, when we’re enjoying the present moment because we’re

lost in a meaningful project, working toward a higher goal, or helping someone who needs us.

Healthy positivity doesn't mean cloaking your authentic feelings. Happiness is not the absence of suffering; it's the ability to rebound from it. And happiness is not the same as joy or ecstasy; happiness includes contentment, well-being, and the emotional flexibility to experience a full range of emotions. At our company, some of us have dealt with anxiety and depression. Some have experienced PTSD. Some of us have witnessed severe mental illness in our families, and some of us have not. We openly share. Or we don't—either way is fine. We support tears in the office, if the situation calls for it (in both sorrow and in laughter).

Some people—perhaps looking for a fresh angle—have even argued that happiness is harmful (see, for example, the last two articles in this book). But the point of practicing exercises that help increase mental and emotional fitness is not to learn to paste a smile on your face or wish away your problems. It's to learn how to handle stressors with more resilience through training, just as you would train to run a marathon.

During my time with Jim in the hospital, I watched him change. It happened in subtle ways at first, but then all at once I realized that practicing gratitude and the happiness that comes with it had given me a gift: It gave me back Jim. If happiness is harmful—then I say, bring it on.

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Being Happy at Work Matters

By Annie McKee

People used to believe that you didn't have to be happy at work to succeed. And you didn't need to like the people you worked with, or even share their values. "Work is *not* personal," the thinking went. This is bunk.

My research with dozens of companies and hundreds of people—along with the research conducted by neuroscientists like Richard Davidson and V.S. Ramachandran and scholars such as Shawn Achor—increasingly points to a simple fact: Happy people are better workers. Those who are engaged with their jobs and colleagues work harder—and smarter.

And yet, an alarmingly high number of people aren't engaged. According to a sobering 2013 Gallup report, only 30% of the U.S. workforce *is* engaged. This echoes what I've seen in my work. Not very many people are truly "emotionally and intellectually committed" to their

organizations.¹ Far too many couldn't care less about what's happening around them. For them, Wednesday is "hump day" and they're just working to get to Friday. And then there's the other end of the bell curve—the nearly one out of five employees who is actively *disengaged*, according to the same Gallup report. These people are sabotaging projects, backstabbing colleagues, and generally wreaking havoc in their workplaces.

The Gallup report also notes that employee engagement has remained largely constant over the years despite economic ups and downs. Scary: We're not engaged with work, and we haven't been for a long time.

Disengaged, unhappy people aren't any fun to work with and don't add much value; they impact our organizations (and our economy) in profoundly negative ways. It's even worse when leaders are disengaged because they infect others with their attitude. Their emotions and mindsets impact others' moods and performance tremendously. After all, how we feel is linked to what and how we think. In other words, thought influences emotion, and emotion influences thinking.²

It's time to finally blow up the myth that feelings don't matter at work. Science is on our side: There are clear neurological links between feelings, thoughts, and actions.³ When we are in the grip of strong negative emotions, it's like having blinders on. We focus mostly—sometimes only—

on the source of the pain. We don't process information as well, think creatively, or make good decisions. Frustration, anger, and stress cause an important part of us to shut down—the part that's thinking and engaged.⁴ Disengagement is a natural neurological and psychological response to pervasive negative emotions.

But it's not just negative emotions we need to watch out for. Extremely strong positive emotions can have the same effect.⁵ Some studies show that too much happiness can make you less creative and prone to engaging in riskier behaviors (think about how we act like fools when we fall in love). On the work front: I've seen groups of people worked up into a frenzy at sales conferences and corporate pep rallies. Little learning or innovation comes out of these meetings. Throw in a lot of alcohol, and you've got a whole host of problems.

If we can agree that our emotional states at work matter, what can we do to increase engagement and improve performance?

Over the past few years, my team at the Teleos Leadership Institute and I have studied dozens of organizations and interviewed thousands of people. The early findings about the links between people's feelings and engagement are fascinating. There are clear similarities in what people say they want and need, no matter where they are from, whom they work for, or what field they're in. We

often assume that there are huge differences across industries and around the world, but the research challenges that assumption.

To be fully engaged and happy, virtually everyone tells, we need three things:

1. *A meaningful vision of the future.* When people talked with our research team about what was working and what wasn't in their organizations and what helped or hindered them the most, they talked about *vision*. People want to be able to see the future and know how they fit in. And, as we know from our work with organizational behavior expert Richard Boyatzis on intentional change, people learn and change when they have a personal vision that is linked to an organizational vision.⁶ Sadly, far too many leaders don't paint a very compelling vision of the future, they don't try to link it to people's personal visions, and they don't communicate well. And they lose people as a result.
2. *A sense of purpose.* People want to feel as if their work matters, that their contributions help achieve something really important. And except for those at the tippy top, shareholder value isn't a meaningful goal that excites and engages them. They want to know that they—and their organizations—are doing something big that matters to other people.

3. *Great relationships.* We know that people join an organization and leave a boss.⁷ A dissonant relationship with one's boss is downright painful. So too are bad relationships with colleagues. Leaders, managers, and employees have all told us that close, trusting, and supportive relationships are hugely important to their state of mind—and their willingness contribute to a team.

Added up, brain science and organizational research are in fact debunking the old myths: Emotions matter a lot at work. Happiness is important. To be fully engaged, people need vision, meaning, purpose, and resonant relationships.

It's on us as individuals to find ways to live our values at work and build great relationships. And it's on leaders to create an environment where people can thrive. It's simple and it's practical: If you want an engaged workforce, pay attention to how you create a vision, link people's work to your company's larger purpose, and reward individuals who resonate with others.

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Richard Boyatzis of *Primal Leadership*, *Resonant Leadership*, and *Becoming a Resonant Leader*. The ideas in this article are expanded in McKee's latest book, *How to Be Happy at Work*, forthcoming from Harvard Business Review Press.

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The Science Behind the Smile

An interview with Daniel Gilbert by Gardiner Morse

Harvard psychology professor Daniel Gilbert is widely known for his 2006 best seller, *Stumbling on Happiness*. His work reveals, among other things, the systematic mistakes we all make in imagining how happy (or miserable) we'll be. In this edited interview with HBR's Gardiner Morse, Gilbert surveys the field of happiness research and explores its frontiers.

HBR: *Happiness research has become a hot topic in the past 20 years. Why?*

Gilbert: It's only recently that we realized we could marry one of our oldest questions—"What is the nature of human happiness?"—to our newest way of getting answers: science. Until just a few decades ago, the problem of happiness was mainly in the hands of philosophers and poets.

Psychologists have always been interested in emotion, but in the past two decades the study of emotion has exploded, and one of the emotions that psychologists have studied most intensively is happiness. Recently economists and neuroscientists joined the party. All these disciplines have distinct but intersecting interests: Psychologists want to understand what people feel, economists want to know what people value, and neuroscientists want to know how people's brains respond to rewards. Having three separate disciplines all interested in a single topic has put that topic on the scientific map. Papers on happiness are published in *Science*, people who study happiness win Nobel prizes, and governments all over the world are rushing to figure out how to measure and increase the happiness of their citizens.

How is it possible to measure something as subjective as happiness?

Measuring subjective experiences is a lot easier than you think. It's what your eye doctor does when she fits you for glasses. She puts a lens in front of your eye and asks you to report your experience, and then she puts another lens up, and then another. She uses your reports as data, submits the data to scientific analysis, and designs a lens that will give you perfect vision—all on the basis of your

reports of your subjective experience. People's real-time reports are very good approximations of their experiences, and they make it possible for us to see the world through their eyes. People may not be able to tell us how happy they were yesterday or how happy they will be tomorrow, but they *can* tell us how they're feeling at the moment we ask them. "How are you?" may be the world's most frequently asked question, and nobody's stumped by it.

There are many ways to measure happiness. We can ask people "How happy are you right now?" and have them rate it on a scale. We can use magnetic resonance imaging to measure cerebral blood flow, or electromyography to measure the activity of the "smile muscles" in the face. But in most circumstances those measures are highly correlated, and you'd have to be the federal government to prefer the complicated, expensive measures over the simple, inexpensive one.

But isn't the scale itself subjective? Your five might be my six.

Imagine that a drugstore sold a bunch of cheap thermometers that weren't very well calibrated. People with normal temperatures might get readings other than 98.6, and two people with the same temperature might get different readings. These inaccuracies could cause

people to seek medical treatment they didn't need or to miss getting treatment they did need. So buggy thermometers are sometimes a problem—but not always. For example, if I brought 100 people to my lab, exposed half of them to a flu virus, and then used those buggy thermometers to take their temperatures a week later, the average temperature of the people who'd been exposed would almost surely be higher than the average temperature of the others. Some thermometers would underestimate, some would overestimate, but as long as I measured enough people, the inaccuracies would cancel themselves out. Even with poorly calibrated instruments, we can compare large groups of people.

A rating scale is like a buggy thermometer. Its inaccuracies make it inappropriate for some kinds of measurement (for example, saying exactly how happy John was at 10:42 am on July 3, 2010), but it's perfectly appropriate for the kinds of measurements most psychological scientists make.

What did all these happiness researchers discover?

Much of the research confirms things we've always suspected. For example, in general people who are in good romantic relationships are happier than those who aren't. Healthy people are happier than sick people. People who participate in their churches are happier than

those who don't. Rich people are happier than poor people. And so on.

That said, there have been some surprises. For example, while all these things do make people happier, it's astonishing how little any one of them matters. Yes, a new house or a new spouse will make you happier, but not much and not for long. As it turns out, people are not very good at predicting what will make them happy or how long that happiness will last. They expect positive events to make them much happier than those events actually do, and they expect negative events to make them unhappier than they actually do. In both field and lab studies, we've found that winning or losing an election, gaining or losing a romantic partner, getting or not getting a promotion, passing or failing an exam all have less impact on happiness than people think they will. A recent study showed that very few experiences affect us for more than three months. When good things happen, we celebrate for a while and then sober up. When bad things happen, we weep and whine for a while and then pick ourselves up and get on with it.

Why do events have such a fleeting effect on happiness?

One reason is that people are good at synthesizing happiness—at finding silver linings. As a result, they usually end up happier than they expect after almost any

kind of trauma or tragedy. Pick up any newspaper, and you'll find plenty of examples. Remember Jim Wright, who resigned in disgrace as Speaker of the House of Representatives because of a shady book deal? A few years later he told the *New York Times* that he was "so much better off, physically, financially, emotionally, mentally and in almost every other way." Then there's Moreese Bickham, who spent 37 years in the Louisiana State Penitentiary; after his release he said, "I don't have one minute's regret. It was a glorious experience." These guys appear to be living in the best of all possible worlds. Speaking of which, Pete Best, the original drummer for the Beatles, was replaced by Ringo Starr in 1962, just before the Beatles got big. Now he's a session drummer. What did he have to say about missing out on the chance to belong to the most famous band of the 20th century? "I'm happier than I would have been with the Beatles."

One of the most reliable findings of the happiness studies is that we do not have to go running to a therapist every time our shoelaces break. We have a remarkable ability to make the best of things. Most people are more resilient than they realize.

Aren't they deluding themselves? Isn't real happiness better than synthetic happiness?

Let's be careful with terms. Nylon is real; it's just not natural. Synthetic happiness is perfectly real; it's just man-made. Synthetic happiness is what we produce when we don't get what we want, and natural happiness is what we experience when we do. They have different origins, but they are not necessarily different in terms of how they feel. One is not obviously better than the other.

Of course, most folks don't see it that way. Most folks think that synthetic happiness isn't as "good" as the other kind—that people who produce it are just fooling themselves and aren't really happy. I know of no evidence demonstrating that that's the case. If you go blind or lose a fortune, you'll find that there's a whole new life on the other side of those events. And you'll find many things about that new life that are quite good. In fact, you'll undoubtedly find a few things that are even better than what you had before. You're not lying to yourself; you're not delusional. You're discovering things you didn't know—*couldn't* know—until you were in that new life. You are looking for things that make your new life better, you are finding them, and they are making you happy. What is most striking to me as a scientist is that most of us don't realize how good we're going to be at finding these things. We'd never say, "Oh, of course, if I lost my money or my wife left me, I'd find a way to be just as happy as I am now." We'd never say it—but it's true.

Is being happy always desirable? Look at all the unhappy creative geniuses—Beethoven, van Gogh, Hemingway. Doesn't a certain amount of unhappiness spur good performance?

Nonsense! Everyone can think of a historical example of someone who was both miserable and creative, but that doesn't mean misery generally promotes creativity. There's certainly someone out there who smoked two packs of cigarettes a day and lived to be 90, but that doesn't mean cigarettes are good for you. The difference between using anecdotes to prove a point and using science to prove a point is that in science you can't just cherry-pick the story that suits you best. You have to examine *all* the stories, or at least take a fair sample of them, and see if there are more miserable creatives or happy creatives, more miserable noncreatives or happy noncreatives. If misery promoted creativity, you'd see a higher percentage of creatives among the miserable than among the delighted. And you don't. By and large, happy people are more creative and more productive. Has there ever been a human being whose misery was the source of his creativity? Of course. But that person is the exception, not the rule.

Many managers would say that contented people aren't the most productive employees, so you want to keep people a

little uncomfortable, maybe a little anxious, about their jobs.

Managers who collect data instead of relying on intuition don't say that. I know of no data showing that anxious, fearful employees are more creative or productive.

Remember, contentment doesn't mean sitting and staring at the wall. That's what people do when they're bored, and people *hate* being bored. We know that people are happiest when they're appropriately challenged—when they're trying to achieve goals that are difficult but not out of reach. Challenge and threat are not the same thing. People blossom when challenged and wither when threatened. Sure, you can get results from threats: Tell someone, "If you don't get this to me by Friday, you're fired," and you'll probably have it by Friday. But you'll also have an employee who will thereafter do his best to undermine you, who will feel no loyalty to the organization, and who will never do more than he must. It would be much more effective to tell your employee, "I don't think most people could get this done by Friday. But I have full faith and confidence that you can. And it's hugely important to the entire team." Psychologists have studied reward and punishment for a century, and the bottom line is perfectly clear: Reward works better.

So challenge makes people happy. What else do we know now about the sources of happiness?

If I had to summarize all the scientific literature on the causes of human happiness in one word, that word would be “social.” We are by far the most social species on Earth. Even ants have nothing on us. If I wanted to predict your happiness, and I could know only one thing about you, I wouldn’t want to know your gender, religion, health, or income. I’d want to know about your social network—about your friends and family and the strength of your bonds with them.

Beyond having rich networks, what makes us happy day to day?

The psychologist Ed Diener has a finding I really like. He essentially shows that the *frequency* of your positive experiences is a much better predictor of your happiness than is the *intensity* of your positive experiences. When we think about what would make us happy, we tend to think of intense events—going on a date with a movie star, winning a Pulitzer, buying a yacht. But Diener and his colleagues have shown that how good your experiences are doesn’t matter nearly as much as how many good experiences you have. Somebody who has a dozen mildly nice things happen each day is likely to be

happier than somebody who has a single truly amazing thing happen. So wear comfortable shoes, give your wife a big kiss, sneak a french fry. It sounds like small stuff, and it is. But the small stuff matters.

I think this helps explain why it's so hard for us to forecast our affective states. We imagine that one or two big things will have a profound effect. But it looks like happiness is the sum of hundreds of small things. Achieving happiness requires the same approach as losing weight. People trying to lose weight want a magic pill that will give them instant results. Ain't no such thing. We know exactly how people lose weight: They eat less and exercise more. They don't have to eat *much* less or exercise *much* more—they just have to do those things consistently. Over time it adds up. Happiness is like that. The things you can do to increase your happiness are obvious and small and take just a little time. But you have to do them every day and wait for the results.

What are those little things we can do to increase our happiness?

They won't surprise you any more than "eat less and exercise more" does. The main things are to commit to some simple behaviors—meditating, exercising, getting enough sleep—and to practice altruism. One of the most selfish things you can do is help others. Volunteer at a

homeless shelter. You may or may not help the homeless, but you will almost surely help yourself. And nurture your social connections. Twice a week, write down three things you're grateful for, and tell someone why. I know these sound like homilies from your grandmother. Well, your grandmother was smart. The secret of happiness is like the secret of weight loss: It's not a secret!

If there's no secret, what's left to study?

There's no shortage of questions. For decades psychologists and economists have been asking, "Who's happy? The rich? The poor? The young? The old?" The best we could do was divide people into groups, survey them once or maybe twice, and try to determine if the people in one group were, on average, happier than those in the others. The tools we used were pretty blunt instruments. But now millions of people are carrying little computers in their pockets—smartphones—and this allows us to collect data in real time from huge numbers of people about what they are doing and feeling from moment to moment. That's never been possible before.

One of my collaborators, Matt Killingsworth, has built an experience-sampling application called Track Your Happiness. He follows more than 15,000 people by iPhone, querying them several times a day about their activities and emotional states. Are they at home? On a

bus? Watching television? Praying? How are they feeling? What are they thinking about? With this technology, Matt's beginning to answer a much better question than the one we've been asking for decades. Instead of asking *who* is happy, he can ask *when* they are happy. He doesn't get the answer by asking, "When are you happy?"—because frankly, people don't know. He gets it by tracking people over days, months, and years and measuring what they are doing and how happy they are while they are doing it. I think this kind of technology is about to revolutionize our understanding of daily emotions and human well-being. (See the sidebar "[The Future of Happiness Research](#).")

What are the new frontiers of happiness research?

We need to get more specific about what we are measuring. Many scientists say they are studying happiness, but when you look at what they're measuring, you find they are actually studying depression or life satisfaction. These things are related to happiness, of course, but they are not the same as happiness. Research shows that people with children are typically less happy on a moment-to-moment basis than people without children. But people who have kids may feel fulfilled in a way that people without kids do not. It doesn't make sense to say that people with kids are happier, or that

people without kids are happier; each group is happier in some ways and less happy in others. We need to stop painting our portrait of happiness with such a fat brush.

Will all this research ultimately make us happier?

We are learning and will continue to learn how to maximize our happiness. So yes, there is no doubt that the research has helped and will continue to help us increase our happiness. But that still leaves the big question: What kind of happiness *should* we want? For example, do we want the average happiness of our moments to be as large as possible, or do we want the sum of our happy moments to be as large as possible? Those are different things. Do we want lives free of pain and heartache, or is there value in those experiences? Science will soon be able to tell us how to live the lives we want, but it will never tell us what kinds of lives we should want to live. That will be for us to decide.

THE FUTURE OF HAPPINESS RESEARCH

by Matthew Killingsworth

You'd think it would be easy to figure out what makes us happy. Until recently, though, researchers have had to rely mainly on people's reports about their average emotional states over long periods of time and on easily

surveyed predictors of happiness, such as demographic variables. As a result, we know that married or wealthy people are, on average, happier than unmarried or less-well-off people. But what is it about being married or having money that makes people happy?

Focusing on average emotional states also smoothes out short-term fluctuations in happiness and consequently diminishes our ability to understand the causes of those fluctuations. For example, how do the moment-by-moment details of a person's day affect that person's happiness?

We can now begin to answer questions like these, thanks to the smartphone. For an ongoing research project called Track Your Happiness, I have recruited more than 15,000 people in 83 countries to report their emotional states in real time, using devices they carry with them every day. I created an iPhone web app that queries users at random intervals, asking them about their mood (respondents slide a button along a scale that ranges from “very bad” to “very good”), what they are doing (they can select from 22 options, including commuting, working, exercising, and eating), and factors such as their level of productivity, the nature of their environment, the amount and quality of their sleep, and their social interactions. Since 2009 we have collected more than half a million data points—making this, to my knowledge, the first-ever large-scale study of happiness in daily life.

One major finding is that people's minds wander nearly half the time, and this appears to lower their mood. Wandering to unpleasant or even neutral topics is associated with sharply lower happiness; straying to positive topics has no effect either way. The amount of mind-wandering varies greatly depending on the activity, from roughly 60% of the time while commuting to

30% when talking to someone or playing a game to 10% during sex. But no matter what people are doing, they are much less happy when their minds are wandering than when their minds are focused.

All of this strongly suggests that to optimize our emotional well-being, we should pay at least as much attention to where our minds are as to what our bodies are doing. Yet for most of us, the focus of our thoughts isn't part of our daily planning. When you wake up on a Saturday morning and ask, "What am I going to do today?" the answer is usually about where you'll take your body—to the beach, to the kids' soccer practice, for a run. You ought to also ask, "What am I going to do with my mind today?"

A related stream of research examines the relationship between mind-wandering and productivity. Many managers, particularly those whose employees do creative knowledge work, may sense that a certain amount of daydreaming is a good thing, providing a mental break and perhaps leading people to reflect on related work matters. Unfortunately, the data so far suggest that, in addition to reducing happiness, mind-wandering on the job reduces productivity. And employees' minds stray much more than managers probably imagine—about 50% of the workday—and almost always veer toward personal concerns. Managers may want to look for ways to help employees stay focused, for the employees' *and* the company's sakes.

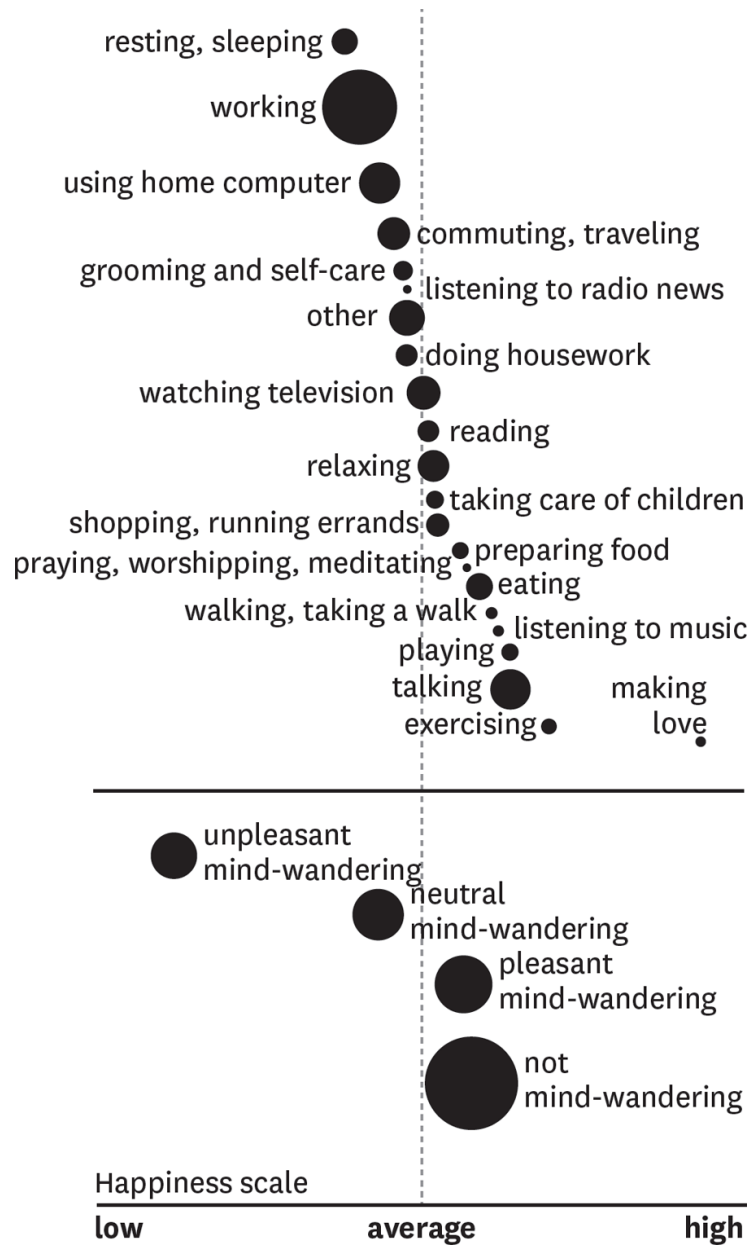
The data are also beginning to paint a picture of variations in happiness within an individual and from one individual to the next. The most striking finding here is that happiness differs more from moment to moment than it does from person to person. This suggests that it's not the stable conditions of our lives, such as where we live or whether we're married, that are the

principal drivers of happiness; it could be the small, everyday things that count the most.

It also suggests that happiness on the job may depend more on our moment-to-moment experiences—our routine interactions with coworkers, the projects we're involved in, our daily contributions—than on the stable conditions thought to promote happiness, such as a high salary or a prestigious title. A priority of my current and future research is to deploy this tracking technology in the workplace and, I hope, at last reveal what actually makes employees happy.

A focused mind is a happy mind

Participants were queried about mood and mind-wandering during 22 activities. The balls represent their activities and thoughts. The farther to the right a ball is, the happier people were, on average. The larger the ball, the more frequently they engaged in the activity or thought.



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The Power of Small Wins

By Teresa M. Amabile and Steven J. Kramer

What is the best way to drive innovative work inside organizations? Important clues hide in the stories of world-renowned creators. It turns out that ordinary scientists, marketers, programmers, and other unsung knowledge workers, whose jobs require creative productivity every day, have more in common with famous innovators than most managers realize. The workday events that ignite their emotions, fuel their motivation, and trigger their perceptions are fundamentally the same.

The Double Helix, James Watson's 1968 memoir about discovering the structure of DNA, describes the roller coaster of emotions he and Francis Crick experienced through the progress and setbacks of the work that eventually earned them the Nobel Prize. After the excitement of their first attempt to build a DNA model, Watson and Crick noticed some serious flaws. According to

Watson, “Our first minutes with the models . . . were not joyous.” Later that evening, “a shape began to emerge which brought back our spirits.” But when they showed their “breakthrough” to colleagues, they found that their model would not work. Dark days of doubt and ebbing motivation followed. When the duo finally had their bona fide breakthrough, and their colleagues found no fault with it, Watson wrote, “My morale skyrocketed, for I suspected that we now had the answer to the riddle.” Watson and Crick were so driven by this success that they practically lived in the lab, trying to complete the work.

Throughout these episodes, Watson and Crick’s progress—or lack thereof—ruled their reactions. In our recent research on creative work inside businesses, we stumbled upon a remarkably similar phenomenon. Through exhaustive analysis of diaries kept by knowledge workers, we discovered the “progress principle”: Of all the things that can boost emotions, motivation, and perceptions during a workday, the single most important is making progress in meaningful work. And the more frequently people experience that sense of progress, the more likely they are to be creatively productive in the long run. Whether they are trying to solve a major scientific mystery or simply produce a high-quality product or service, everyday progress—even a small win—can make all the difference in how they feel and perform.

The power of progress is fundamental to human nature, but few managers understand it or know how to leverage progress to boost motivation. In fact, work motivation has been a subject of long-standing debate. In a survey asking about the keys to motivating workers, we found that some managers ranked recognition for good work as most important, while others put more stock in tangible incentives. Some focused on the value of interpersonal support, while still others thought clear goals were the answer. Interestingly, very few of our surveyed managers ranked progress first. (See the sidebar [“A Surprise for Managers.”](#))

A SURPRISE FOR MANAGERS

In a 1968 issue of HBR, Frederick Herzberg published a now-classic article titled “One More Time: How Do you Motivate Employees?” Our findings are consistent with his message: People are most satisfied with their jobs (and therefore most motivated) when those jobs give them the opportunity to experience achievement. The diary research we describe in this article—in which we microscopically examined the events of thousands of workdays, in real time—uncovered the mechanism underlying the sense of achievement: making consistent, meaningful progress.

But managers seem not to have taken Herzberg’s lesson to heart. To assess contemporary awareness of the importance of daily work progress, we recently administered a survey to 669 managers of varying levels from

dozens of companies around the world. We asked about the managerial tools that can affect employees' motivation and emotions. The respondents ranked five tools—support for making progress in the work, recognition for good work, incentives, interpersonal support, and clear goals—in order of importance.

Of the managers who took our survey, 95% would probably be surprised to learn that supporting progress is the primary way to elevate motivation—because that's the percentage who failed to rank progress number one. In fact, only 35 managers ranked progress as the number one motivator—a mere 5%. The vast majority of respondents ranked support for making progress dead last as a motivator and third as an influence on emotion. They ranked “recognition for good work (either public or private)” as the most important factor in motivating workers and making them happy. In our diary study, recognition certainly did boost inner work life. But it wasn't nearly as prominent as progress. Besides, without work achievements, there is little to recognize.

If you are a manager, the progress principle holds clear implications for where to focus your efforts. It suggests that you have more influence than you may realize over employees' well-being, motivation, and creative output. Knowing what serves to catalyze and nourish progress—and what does the opposite—turns out to be the key to effectively managing people and their work.

In this article, we share what we have learned about the power of progress and how managers can leverage it.

We spell out how a focus on progress translates into concrete managerial actions and provide a checklist to help make such behaviors habitual. But to clarify why those actions are so potent, we first describe our research and what the knowledge workers' diaries revealed about their "inner work lives."

Inner work life and performance

For nearly 15 years, we have been studying the psychological experiences and the performance of people doing complex work inside organizations. Early on, we realized that a central driver of creative, productive performance was the quality of a person's inner work life: the mix of emotions, motivations, and perceptions over the course of a workday. How happy workers feel; how motivated they are by an intrinsic interest in the work; how positively they view their organization, their management, their team, their work, and themselves—all these combine either to push them to higher levels of achievement or to drag them down.

To understand such interior dynamics better, we asked members of project teams to respond individually to an end-of-day email survey during the course of the project—just over four months, on average. (For more on this research, see our article ["Inner Work Life: Understanding](#)

[the Subtext of Business Performance](#),” HBR May 2007.)

The projects—inventing kitchen gadgets, managing product lines of cleaning tools, and solving complex IT problems for a hotel empire, for example—all involved creativity. The daily survey inquired about participants’ emotions and moods, motivation levels, and perceptions of the work environment that day, as well as what work they did and what events stood out in their minds.

Twenty-six project teams from seven companies participated, comprising 238 individuals. This yielded nearly 12,000 diary entries. Naturally, every individual in our population experienced ups and downs. Our goal was to discover the states of inner work life and the workday events that correlated with the highest levels of creative output.

In a dramatic rebuttal to the commonplace claim that high pressure and fear spur achievement, we found that, at least in the realm of knowledge work, people are more creative and productive when their inner work lives are positive—when they feel happy, are intrinsically motivated by the work itself, and have positive perceptions of their colleagues and the organization. Moreover, in those positive states, people are more committed to the work and more collegial toward those around them. Inner work life, we saw, can fluctuate from one day to the next—sometimes wildly—and performance along with it. A person’s inner

work life on a given day fuels his or her performance for the day and can even affect performance the *next* day.

Once this “inner work-life effect” became clear, our inquiry turned to whether and how managerial action could set it in motion. What events could evoke positive or negative emotions, motivations, and perceptions? The answers were tucked within our research participants’ diary entries. There are predictable triggers that inflate or deflate inner work life, and, even accounting for variation among individuals, they are pretty much the same for everyone.

The power of progress

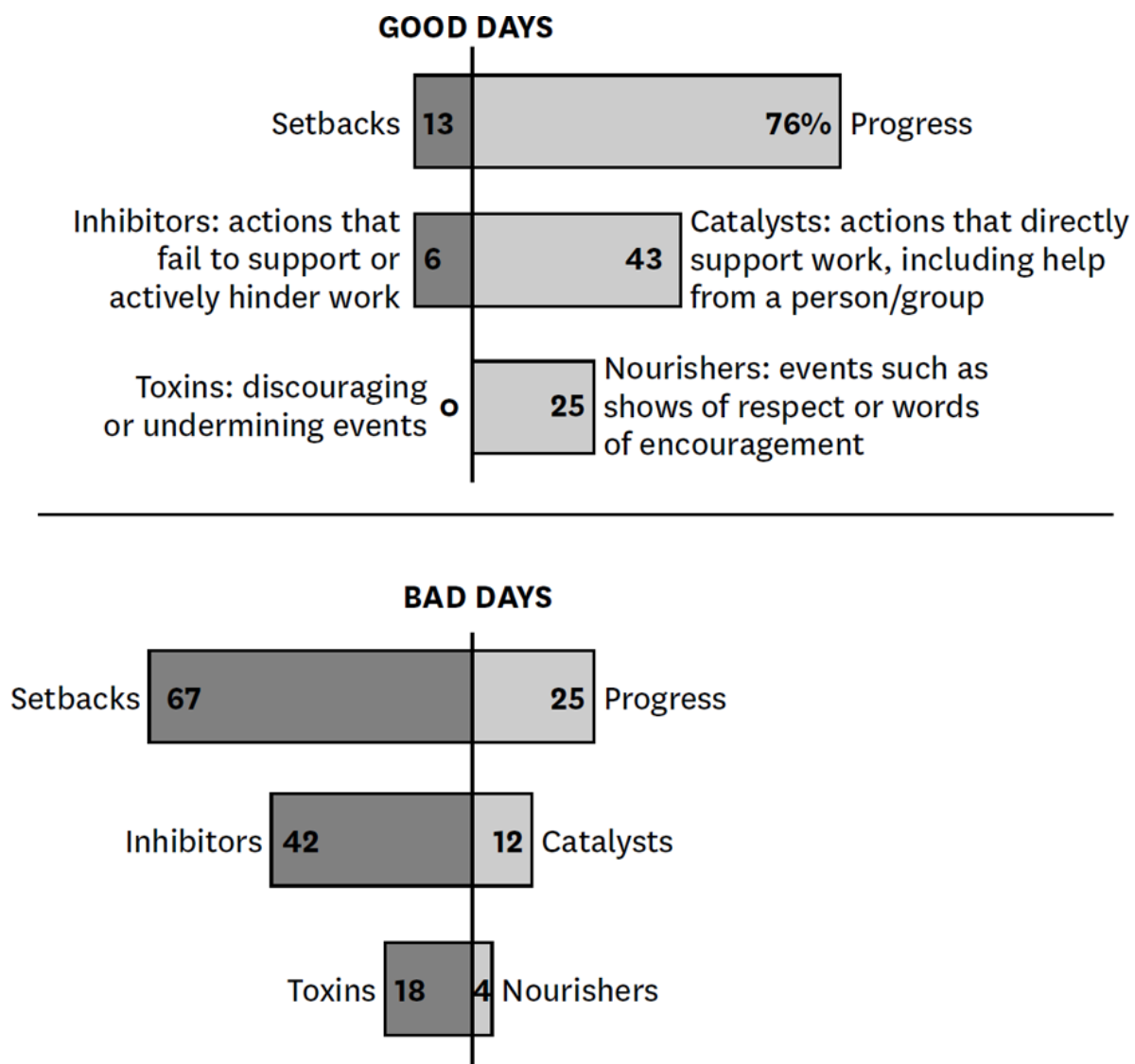
Our hunt for inner work-life triggers led us to the progress principle. When we compared our research participants’ best and worst days (based on their overall mood, specific emotions, and motivation levels), we found that the most common event triggering a “best day” was any progress in the work by the individual or the team. The most common event triggering a “worst day” was a setback.

Consider, for example, how progress relates to one component of inner work life: overall mood ratings. Steps forward occurred on 76% of people’s best-mood days. By contrast, setbacks occurred on only 13% of those days.

(See the figure “What happens on good days and bad days?”)

What happens on good days and bad days?

Progress—even a small step forward—occurs on many of the days people report being in a good mood. Events on bad days—setbacks and other hindrances—are nearly the mirror image of those on good days.



Two other types of inner work-life triggers also occur frequently on best days: *catalysts*, actions that directly support work, including help from a person or group, and *nourishers*, events such as shows of respect and words of encouragement. Each has an opposite: *inhibitors*, actions that fail to support or actively hinder work, and *toxins*, discouraging or undermining events. Whereas catalysts and inhibitors are directed at the project, nourishers and toxins are directed at the person. Like setbacks, inhibitors and toxins are rare on days of great inner work life.

Events on worst-mood days are nearly the mirror image of those on best-mood days. Here, setbacks predominated, occurring on 67% of those days; progress occurred on only 25% of them. Inhibitors and toxins also marked many worst-mood days, and catalysts and nourishers were rare.

This is the progress principle made visible: If a person is motivated and happy at the end of a workday, it's a good bet that he or she made some progress. If the person drags out of the office disengaged and joyless, a setback is most likely to blame.

When we analyzed all 12,000 daily surveys filled out by our participants, we discovered that progress and setbacks influence all three aspects of inner work life. On days when they made progress, our participants reported more positive *emotions*. They not only were in a more upbeat mood in general but also expressed more joy, warmth, and

pride. When they suffered setbacks, they experienced more frustration, fear, and sadness.

Motivations were also affected: On progress days, people were more intrinsically motivated—by interest in and enjoyment of the work itself. On setback days, they were not only less intrinsically motivated but also less extrinsically motivated by recognition. Apparently, setbacks can lead a person to feel generally apathetic and disinclined to do the work at all.

Perceptions differed in many ways, too. On progress days, people perceived significantly more positive challenge in their work. They saw their teams as more mutually supportive and reported more positive interactions between the teams and their supervisors. On a number of dimensions, perceptions suffered when people encountered setbacks. They found less positive challenge in the work, felt that they had less freedom in carrying it out, and reported that they had insufficient resources. On setback days, participants perceived both their teams and their supervisors as less supportive.

To be sure, our analyses establish correlations but do not prove causality. Were these changes in inner work life the result of progress and setbacks, or was the effect the other way around? The numbers alone cannot answer that. However, we do know, from reading thousands of diary entries, that more-positive perceptions, a sense of

accomplishment, satisfaction, happiness, and even elation often followed progress. Here's a typical post-progress entry, from a programmer: "I smashed that bug that's been frustrating me for almost a calendar week. That may not be an event to you, but I live a very drab life, so I'm all hyped."

Likewise, we saw that deteriorating perceptions, frustration, sadness, and even disgust often followed setbacks. As another participant, a product marketer, wrote, "We spent a lot of time updating the cost reduction project list, and after tallying all the numbers, we are still coming up short of our goal. It is discouraging to not be able to hit it after all the time spent and hard work."

Almost certainly, the causality goes both ways, and managers can use this feedback loop between progress and inner work life to support both.

Minor milestones

When we think about progress, we often imagine how good it feels to achieve a long-term goal or experience a major breakthrough. These big wins are great—but they are relatively rare. The good news is that even small wins can boost inner work life tremendously. Many of the progress events our research participants reported represented only minor steps forward. Yet they often evoked outsize positive reactions. Consider this diary entry from a programmer in a

high-tech company, which was accompanied by very positive self-ratings of her emotions, motivations, and perceptions that day: “I figured out why something was not working correctly. I felt relieved and happy because this was a minor milestone for me.”

Even ordinary, incremental progress can increase people’s engagement in the work and their happiness during the workday. Across all the types of events our participants reported, a notable proportion (28%) that had a minor impact on the project had a major impact on people’s feelings about it. Because inner work life has such a potent effect on creativity and productivity, and because small but consistent steps forward shared by many people can accumulate into excellent execution, progress events that often go unnoticed are critical to the overall performance of organizations.

Unfortunately, there is a flip side. Small losses or setbacks can have an extremely negative effect on inner work life. In fact, our study and research by others show that negative events can have a more powerful impact than positive ones. Consequently, it is especially important for managers to minimize daily hassles. (See again the figure “[What happens on good days and bad days?](#)”)

Progress in meaningful work

We've shown how gratifying it is for workers when they are able to chip away at a goal, but recall what we said earlier: The key to motivating performance is supporting progress in *meaningful* work. Making headway boosts your inner work life, but only if the work matters to you.

Think of the most boring job you've ever had. Many people nominate their first job as a teenager—washing pots and pans in a restaurant kitchen, for example, or checking coats at a museum. In jobs like those, the power of progress seems elusive. No matter how hard you work, there are always more pots to wash and coats to check; only punching the time clock at the end of the day or getting the paycheck at the end of the week yields a sense of accomplishment.

In jobs with much more challenge and room for creativity, like the ones our research participants had, simply “making progress”—getting tasks done—doesn't guarantee a good inner work life, either. You may have experienced this rude fact in your own job, on days (or in projects) when you felt demotivated, devalued, and frustrated, even though you worked hard and got things done. The likely cause is your perception of the completed tasks as peripheral or irrelevant. For the progress principle to operate, the work must be meaningful to the person doing it.

In 1983, Steve Jobs was trying to entice John Sculley to leave a wildly successful career at PepsiCo to become Apple's new CEO. Jobs reportedly asked him, "Do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water or do you want a chance to change the world?" In making his pitch, Jobs leveraged a potent psychological force: the deep-seated human desire to do meaningful work.

Fortunately, to feel meaningful, work doesn't have to involve putting the first personal computers in the hands of ordinary people, or alleviating poverty, or helping to cure cancer. Work with less profound importance to society can matter if it contributes value to something or someone important to the worker. Meaning can be as simple as making a useful and high-quality product for a customer or providing a genuine service for a community. It can be supporting a colleague or boosting an organization's profits by reducing inefficiencies in a production process. Whether the goals are lofty or modest, as long as they are meaningful to the worker and it is clear how his or her efforts contribute to them, progress toward them can galvanize inner work life.

In principle, managers shouldn't have to go to extraordinary lengths to infuse jobs with meaning. Most jobs in modern organizations are potentially meaningful for the people doing them. However, managers can make sure that employees know just how their work is contributing.

And, most important, they can avoid actions that negate its value. (See the sidebar “[How Work Gets Stripped of Its Meaning](#).”) All the participants in our research were doing work that should have been meaningful; no one was washing pots or checking coats. Shockingly often, however, we saw potentially important, challenging work losing its power to inspire.

HOW WORK GETS STRIPPED OF ITS MEANING

Diary entries from 238 knowledge workers who were members of creative project teams revealed four primary ways in which managers unwittingly drain work of its meaning.

Managers may dismiss the importance of employees’ work or ideas.

Consider the case of Richard, a senior lab technician at a chemical company, who found meaning in helping his new-product development team solve complex technical problems. However, in team meetings over the course of a three-week period, Richard perceived that his team leader was ignoring his suggestions and those of his teammates. As a result, he felt that his contributions were not meaningful, and his spirits flagged. When at last he believed that he was again making a substantive contribution to the success of the project, his mood improved dramatically: “I felt much better at today’s team meeting. I felt that my opinions and information were important to the project and that we have made some progress.”

They may destroy employees’ sense of ownership of their work.

Frequent and abrupt reassignments often have this effect. This happened

repeatedly to the members of a product development team in a giant consumer products company, as described by team member Bruce: “As I’ve been handing over some projects, I do realize that I don’t like to give them up. Especially when you have been with them from the start and are nearly to the end. You lose ownership. This happens to us way too often.”

Managers may send the message that the work employees are doing will never see the light of day. They can signal this—unintentionally—by shifting their priorities or changing their minds about how something should be done. We saw the latter in an internet technology company after user-interface developer Burt had spent weeks designing seamless transitions for non-English-speaking users. Not surprisingly, Burt’s mood was seriously marred on the day he reported this incident: “Other options for the international [interfaces] were [given] to the team during a team meeting, which could render the work I am doing useless.”

They may neglect to inform employees about unexpected changes in a customer’s priorities. Often, this arises from poor customer management or inadequate communication within the company. For example, Stuart, a data transformation expert at an IT company, reported deep frustration and low motivation on the day he learned that weeks of the team’s hard work might have been for naught: “Found out that there is a strong possibility that the project may not be going forward, due to a shift in the client’s agenda. Therefore, there is a strong possibility that all the time and effort put into the project was a waste of our time.”

Supporting progress: catalysts and nourishers

What can managers do to ensure that people are motivated, committed, and happy? How can they support workers' daily progress? They can use catalysts and nourishers, the other kinds of frequent "best day" events we discovered.

Catalysts are actions that support work. They include setting clear goals, allowing autonomy, providing sufficient resources and time, helping with the work, openly learning from problems and successes, and allowing a free exchange of ideas. Their opposites, inhibitors, include failing to provide support and actively interfering with the work. Because of their impact on progress, catalysts and inhibitors ultimately affect inner work life. But they also have a more immediate impact: When people realize that they have clear and meaningful goals, sufficient resources, helpful colleagues, and so on, they get an instant boost to their emotions, their motivation to do a great job, and their perceptions of the work and the organization.

Nourishers are acts of interpersonal support, such as respect and recognition, encouragement, emotional comfort, and opportunities for affiliation. Toxins, their opposites, include disrespect, discouragement, disregard for emotions, and interpersonal conflict. For good and for

ill, nourishers and toxins affect inner work life directly and immediately.

Catalysts and nourishers—and their opposites—can alter the meaningfulness of work by shifting people's perceptions of their jobs and even themselves. For instance, when a manager makes sure that people have the resources they need, it signals to them that what they are doing is important and valuable. When managers recognize people for the work they do, it signals that they are important to the organization. In this way, catalysts and nourishers can lend greater meaning to the work—and amplify the operation of the progress principle.

The managerial actions that constitute catalysts and nourishers are not particularly mysterious; they may sound like Management 101, if not just common sense and common decency. But our diary study reminded us how often they are ignored or forgotten. Even some of the more attentive managers in the companies we studied did not consistently provide catalysts and nourishers. For example, a supply chain specialist named Michael was, in many ways and on most days, an excellent subteam manager. But he was occasionally so overwhelmed that he became toxic toward his people. When a supplier failed to complete a “hot” order on time and Michael's team had to resort to air shipping to meet the customer's deadline, he realized that the profit margin on the sale would be blown. In irritation,

he lashed out at his subordinates, demeaning the solid work they had done and disregarding their own frustration with the supplier. In his diary, he admitted as much: “As of Friday, we have spent \$28,000 in air freight to send 1,500 \$30 spray jet mops to our number two customer. Another 2,800 remain on this order, and there is a good probability that they too will gain wings. I have turned from the kindly supply chain manager into the black-masked executioner. All similarity to civility is gone, our backs are against the wall, flight is not possible, therefore fight is probable.”

Even when managers don’t have their backs against the wall, developing long-term strategy and launching new initiatives can often seem more important—and perhaps sexier—than making sure subordinates have what they need to make steady progress and feel supported as human beings. But as we saw repeatedly in our research, even the best strategy will fail if managers ignore the people working in the trenches to execute it.

A model manager—and a tool for emulating him

We could explain the many (and largely unsurprising) moves that can catalyze progress and nourish spirits, but it may be more useful to give an example of a manager who

consistently used those moves—and then to provide a simple tool that can help any manager do so.

Our model manager is Graham, whom we observed leading a small team of chemical engineers within a multinational European firm we'll call Kruger-Bern. The mission of the team's NewPoly project was clear and meaningful enough: Develop a safe, biodegradable polymer to replace petrochemicals in cosmetics and, eventually, in a wide range of consumer products. As in many large firms however, the project was nested in a confusing and sometimes threatening corporate setting of shifting top-management priorities, conflicting signals, and wavering commitments. Resources were uncomfortably tight, and uncertainty loomed over the project's future—and every team member's career. Even worse, an incident early in the project, in which an important customer reacted angrily to a sample, left the team reeling. Yet Graham was able to sustain team members' inner work lives by repeatedly and visibly removing obstacles, materially supporting progress, and emotionally supporting the team.

Graham's management approach excelled in four ways. First, he established a positive climate, one event at a time, which set behavioral norms for the entire team. When the customer complaint stopped the project in its tracks, for example, he engaged immediately with the team to analyze the problem, without recriminations, and develop a plan for

repairing the relationship. In doing so, he modeled how to respond to crises in the work: not by panicking or pointing fingers but by identifying problems and their causes and developing a coordinated action plan. This is both a practical approach and a great way to give subordinates a sense of forward movement even in the face of the missteps and failures inherent in any complex project.

Second, Graham stayed attuned to his team's everyday activities and progress. In fact, the nonjudgmental climate he had established made this happen naturally. Team members updated him frequently—without being asked—on their setbacks, progress, and plans. At one point, one of his hardest-working colleagues, Brady, had to abort a trial of a new material because he couldn't get the parameters right on the equipment. It was bad news, because the New-Poly team had access to the equipment only one day a week, but Brady immediately informed Graham. In his diary entry that evening, Brady noted, "He didn't like the lost week but seemed to understand." That understanding assured Graham's place in the stream of information that would allow him to give his people just what they needed to make progress.

Third, Graham targeted his support according to recent events in the team and the project. Each day, he could anticipate what type of intervention—a catalyst or the removal of an inhibitor; a nourisher or some antidote to a

toxin—would have the most impact on team members' inner work lives and progress. And if he could not make that judgment, he asked. Most days it was not hard to figure out, as on the day he received some uplifting news about his bosses' commitment to the project. He knew the team was jittery about a rumored corporate reorganization and could use the encouragement. Even though the clarification came during a well-earned vacation day, he immediately got on the phone to relay the good news to the team.

Finally, Graham established himself as a resource for team members rather than a micromanager; he was sure to check in while never seeming to check *up* on them. Superficially, checking in and checking up seem quite similar, but micromanagers make four kinds of mistakes. First, they fail to allow autonomy in carrying out the work. Unlike Graham, who gave the NewPoly team a clear strategic goal but respected members' ideas about how to meet it, micromanagers dictate every move. Second, they frequently ask subordinates about their work without providing any real help. By contrast, when one of Graham's team members reported problems, Graham helped analyze them—remaining open to alternative interpretations—and often ended up helping to get things back on track. Third, micromanagers are quick to affix personal blame when problems arise, leading subordinates to hide problems

rather than honestly discuss how to surmount them, as Graham did with Brady. And fourth, micromanagers tend to hoard information to use as a secret weapon. Few realize how damaging this is to inner work life. When subordinates perceive that a manager is withholding potentially useful information, they feel infantilized, their motivation wanes, and their work is handicapped. Graham was quick to communicate upper management's views of the project, customers' opinions and needs, and possible sources of assistance or resistance within and outside the organization.

In all those ways, Graham sustained his team's positive emotions, intrinsic motivation, and favorable perceptions. His actions serve as a powerful example of how managers at any level can approach each day determined to foster progress.

We know that many managers, however well-intentioned, will find it hard to establish the habits that seemed to come so naturally to Graham. Awareness, of course, is the first step. However, turning an awareness of the importance of inner work life into routine action takes discipline. With that in mind, we developed a checklist for managers to consult on a daily basis (see the sidebar "[The Daily Progress Checklist](#)"). The aim of the checklist is managing for meaningful progress, one day at a time.

The progress loop

Inner work life drives performance; in turn, good performance, which depends on consistent progress, enhances inner work life. We call this the “progress loop”—it reveals the potential for self-reinforcing benefits.

So, the most important implication of the progress principle is this: By supporting people and their daily progress in meaningful work, managers improve not only the inner work lives of their employees but also the organization’s long-term performance, which enhances inner work life even more. Of course, there is a dark side—the possibility of negative feedback loops. If managers fail to support progress and the people trying to make it, inner work life suffers and so does performance; and degraded performance further undermines inner work life.

A second implication of the progress principle is that managers needn’t fret about trying to read the psyches of their workers or manipulate complicated incentive schemes to ensure that employees are motivated and happy. As long as managers show basic respect and consideration, they can focus on supporting the work itself.

To become an effective manager, you must learn to set this positive feedback loop in motion. That may require a significant shift. Business schools, business books, and managers themselves usually focus on managing

organizations or people. But if you focus on managing progress, the management of people—and even of entire organizations—becomes much more feasible. You won't have to figure out how to x-ray the inner work lives of subordinates; if you facilitate their steady progress in meaningful work, make that progress salient to them, and treat them well, they will experience the emotions, motivations, and perceptions necessary for great performance. Their superior work will contribute to organizational success. And here's the beauty of it: They will love their jobs.

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THE DAILY PROGRESS CHECKLIST

Near the end of each workday, use this checklist to review the day and plan your managerial actions for the next day. After a few days, you will be able to identify issues by scanning the boldface words.

First, focus on progress and setbacks and think about specific events (catalysts, nourishers, inhibitors, and toxins) that contributed to them. Next, consider any clear inner-work-life clues and what further information they provide about progress and other events. Finally, prioritize for action.

The action plan for the next day is the most important part of your daily review: What is the one thing you can do to best facilitate progress?

Progress

Which 1 or 2 events today indicated either a small win or a possible breakthrough? (Describe briefly.)

Catalysts

- ☐ Did the team have clear short- and long-term **goals** for meaningful work?
- ☐ Did team members have sufficient **autonomy** to solve problems and take ownership of the project?
- ☐ Did they have all the **resources** they needed to move forward efficiently?

- ☐ Did they have sufficient **time** to focus on meaningful work?
- ☐ Did I discuss **lessons** from today's successes and problems with my team?
- ☐ Did I give or get them **help** when they needed or requested it? Did I encourage team members to help one another?
- ☐ Did I help **ideas** flow freely within the group?

Nourishers

- ☐ Did I show **respect** to team members by recognizing their contributions to progress, attending to their ideas, and treating them as trusted professionals?
- ☐ Did I **encourage** team members who faced difficult challenges?
- ☐ Did I **support** team members who had a personal or professional problem?
- ☐ Is there a sense of personal and professional **affiliation** and camaraderie within the team?

Setbacks

Which 1 or 2 events today indicated either a small setback or a possible crisis? (Describe briefly.)

Inhibitors

- ☐ Was there any confusion regarding long- or short-term **goals** for meaningful work?
- ☐ Were team members overly **constrained** in their ability to solve problems and feel ownership of the project?
- ☐ Did they lack any of the **resources** they needed to move forward effectively?
- ☐ Did they lack sufficient **time** to focus on meaningful work?
- ☐ Did I or others fail to provide needed or requested **help**?
- ☐ Did I “punish” failure or neglect to find **lessons** and/or opportunities in problems and successes?
- ☐ Did I or others cut off the presentation or debate of **ideas** prematurely?

Toxins

- ☐ Did I **disrespect** any team members by failing to recognize their contributions to progress, not attending to their ideas, or not treating them as trusted professionals?
- ☐ Did I **discourage** a member of the team in any way?
- ☐ Did I **neglect** a team member who had a personal or professional problem?
- ☐ Is there tension or **antagonism** among members of the team or between team members and me?

Inner work life

- Did I see any indications of the quality of my subordinates' inner work lives today? _____

- Perceptions of the work, team, management, firm

- Emotions _____

- Motivation _____

- What specific events might have affected inner work life today?

Action plan

- What can I do tomorrow to strengthen the catalysts and nourishers identified and provide the ones that are lacking?

- What can I do tomorrow to start eliminating the inhibitors and toxins identified? _____

Creating Sustainable Performance

By Gretchen Spreitzer and Christine Porath

When the economy's in terrible shape, when any of us is lucky to have a job—let alone one that's financially and intellectually rewarding—worrying about whether or not your employees are happy might seem a little over the top. But in our research into what makes for a consistently high-performing workforce, we've found good reason to care: Happy employees produce more than unhappy ones over the long term. They routinely show up at work, they're less likely to quit, they go above and beyond the call of duty, and they attract people who are just as committed to the job. Moreover, they're not sprinters; they're more like marathon runners, in it for the long haul.

So what does it mean to be happy in your job? It's not about *contentment*, which connotes a degree of complacency. When we and our research partners at the Ross School of Business's Center for Positive

Organizational Scholarship started looking into the factors involved in sustainable individual and organizational performance, we found a better word: *thriving*. We think of a thriving workforce as one in which employees are not just satisfied and productive but also engaged in creating the future—the company’s and their own. Thriving employees have a bit of an edge: They are highly energized—but they know how to avoid burnout.

Across industries and job types, we found that people who fit our description of thriving demonstrated 16% better overall performance (as reported by their managers) and 125% less burnout (self-reported) than their peers. They were 32% more committed to the organization and 46% more satisfied with their jobs. They also missed much less work and reported significantly fewer doctor visits, which meant health care savings and less lost time for the company.

We’ve identified two components of thriving. The first is *vitality*: the sense of being alive, passionate, and excited. Employees who experience vitality spark energy in themselves and others. Companies generate vitality by giving people the sense that what they do on a daily basis makes a difference.

The second component is *learning*: the growth that comes from gaining new knowledge and skills. Learning can bestow a technical advantage and status as an expert.

Learning can also set in motion a virtuous cycle: People who are developing their abilities are likely to believe in their potential for further growth.

The two qualities work in concert; one without the other is unlikely to be sustainable and may even damage performance. Learning, for instance, creates momentum for a time, but without passion it can lead to burnout. What will I do with what I've learned? Why should I stick with this job? Vitality alone—even when you love the kudos you get for delivering results—can be deadening: When the work doesn't give you opportunities to learn, it's just the same thing over and over again.

The combination of vitality and learning leads to employees who deliver results and find ways to grow. Their work is rewarding not just because they successfully perform what's expected of them today but also because they have a sense of where they and the company are headed. In short, they are thriving, and the energy they create is contagious. (See the sidebar “[About the Research](#).”)

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Over the past seven years, we have been researching the nature of thriving in the workplace and the factors that enhance or inhibit it.

Across several studies with our colleagues Cristina Gibson and Flannery Garnett, we surveyed or interviewed more than 1,200 white- and blue-collar employees in an array of industries, including higher education, health care, financial services, maritime, energy, and manufacturing. We also studied metrics reflecting energy, learning, and growth, based on information supplied by employees and bosses, along with retention rates, health, overall job performance, and organizational citizenship behaviors.

We developed a definition of thriving that breaks the concept into two factors: *vitality*—the sense that you’re energized and alive; and *learning*—the gaining of knowledge and skills.

When you put the two together, the statistics are striking. For example, people who were high energy and high learning were 21% more effective as leaders than those who were only high energy. The outcomes on one measure in particular—health—were even more extreme. Those who were high energy and low learning were 54% worse when it came to health than those who were high in both.

How organizations can help employees thrive

Some employees thrive no matter the context. They naturally build vitality and learning into their jobs, and they inspire the people around them. A smart hiring manager will look for those people. But most employees are

influenced by their environment. Even those predisposed to flourish can fold under pressure.

The good news is that—without heroic measures or major financial investments—leaders and managers can jump-start a culture that encourages employees to thrive. That is, managers can overcome organizational inertia to promote thriving and the productivity that follows it—in many cases with a relatively modest shift in attention.

Ideally, you'd be blessed with a workforce full of people who naturally thrive. But there's a lot you can do to release and sustain enthusiasm. Our research has uncovered four mechanisms that create the conditions for thriving employees: providing decision-making discretion, sharing information, minimizing incivility, and offering performance feedback. The mechanisms overlap somewhat. For instance, if you let people make decisions but give them incomplete information, or leave them exposed to hostile reactions, they'll suffer rather than thrive. One mechanism by itself will get you part of the way, but all four are necessary to create a culture of thriving. Let's look at each in turn.

Providing decision-making discretion

Employees at every level are energized by the ability to make decisions that affect their work. Empowering them in

this way gives them a greater sense of control, more say in how things get done, and more opportunities for learning.

The airline industry might seem like an unlikely place to find decision-making discretion (let alone a thriving workforce), but consider one company we studied, Alaska Airlines, which created a culture of empowerment that has contributed to a major turnaround over the past decade. In the early 2000s the airline's numbers were flagging, so senior management launched the 2010 Plan, which explicitly invited employee input into decisions that would improve service while maintaining a reputation for timely departures. Employees were asked to set aside their current perceptions of "good" service and consider new ways to contribute, coming up with ideas that could take service from good to truly great. Agents embraced the program, which gave them, for instance, the discretion to find solutions for customers who had missed flights or were left behind for any other reason. Ron Calvin, the director of the eastern region, told us of a call he had recently received on his cell phone from a customer he hadn't seen or spoken to since working at the Seattle airport, five years earlier. The customer had a three-month-old grandchild who had just gone into cardiac arrest. The grandparents were trying to get back to Seattle from Honolulu. Everything was booked. Ron made a few calls and got them

on a flight right away. That day the grandfather sent Ron a text saying, simply, “We made it.”

Efforts like this to meet individual needs without holding up flights have led to a number one rating for on-time performance and a full trophy case. The airline has also expanded considerably into new markets, including Hawaii, the Midwest, and the East Coast.

Southwest is a better-known story, largely because of the company’s reputation for having a fun and caring culture. Flight attendants are often eager to sing, joke around, and in general entertain customers. They also radiate energy and a passion for learning. One decided to offer the preflight safety instructions in rap format. He was motivated to put his special talents to work, and the passengers loved it, reporting that it was the first time they had actually paid attention to the instructions.

At Facebook, decision-making discretion is fundamental to the culture. One employee posted a note on the site expressing his surprise, and pleasure, at the company’s motto, “Move fast and break things,” which encourages employees to make decisions and act. On just his second day of work, he found a fix to a complicated bug. He expected some sort of hierarchical review, but his boss, the vice president of product, just smiled and said, “Ship it.” He marveled that so early on he had delivered a solution that would instantly reach millions of people.

The challenge for managers is to avoid cutting back on empowerment when people make mistakes. Those situations create the best conditions for learning—not only for the parties concerned but also for others, who can learn vicariously.

Sharing information

Doing your job in an information vacuum is tedious and uninspiring; there's no reason to look for innovative solutions if you can't see the larger impact. People can contribute more effectively when they understand how their work fits with the organization's mission and strategy.

Alaska Airlines has chosen to invest management time in helping employees gain a broad view of the company's strategy. The 2010 Plan was launched with traditional communications but also with a months-long road show and training classes designed to help employees share ideas. The CEO, the president, and the COO still go on the road quarterly to gather information about the idiosyncrasies of various markets; they then disseminate what they've learned. The benefits show up in yearly measures of employee pride in the company—now knocking it out of the park at 90%.

At Zingerman's (an Ann Arbor, Michigan, community of food-related businesses that has worked closely with

Wayne Baker, a colleague of ours at the Center for Positive Organizational Scholarship), information is as transparent as possible. The organization had never consciously withheld its numbers—financial information was tacked up for employees to see—but when cofounders Ari Weinzweig and Paul Saginaw studied open book management in the mid-1990s, they came to believe that employees would show more interest if they got involved in the “game.”

Implementation of a more formal and meaningful open book policy was not easy. People could look at the numbers, but they had little reason to pay attention and didn’t get much insight into how the data related to their daily work. For the first five or six years, the company struggled to build the concept into its systems and routines and to wrap people’s minds around what Baker calls “the rigor of the huddle”: weekly gatherings around a whiteboard at which teams track results, “keep score,” and forecast the next week’s numbers. Although people understood the rules of open book management, at first they didn’t see the point of adding yet another meeting to their busy schedules. It wasn’t until senior leaders made huddling non-negotiable that employees grasped the true purpose of the whiteboards, which displayed not just financial figures but also service and food quality measures, check averages, internal satisfaction figures, and “fun,” which could mean

anything from weekly contests to customer satisfaction ratings to employees' ideas for innovation.

Some Zingerman's businesses began instituting "mini games": short-term incentives to find a problem or capitalize on an opportunity. For instance, the staff at Zingerman's Roadhouse restaurant used the greeter game to track how long it took for customers to be greeted. "Ungreeted" customers expressed less satisfaction, and employees found themselves frequently comping purchases to make up for service lapses. The greeter game challenged the host team to greet every customer within five minutes of being seated, with a modest financial reward for 50 straight days of success. It inspired hosts to quickly uncover and fill holes in the service process. Service scores improved considerably over the course of a month. Other Zingerman's businesses started similar games, with incentives for faster delivery, fewer knife injuries in the bakery (which would lower insurance costs), and neater kitchens.

The games have naturally created some internal tensions by delivering the bad news along with the good, which can be demoralizing. But overall they have greatly increased frontline employees' sense of ownership, contributing to better performance. From 2000 to 2010 Zingerman's revenue grew by almost 300%, to more than

\$35 million. The company's leaders credit open book management as a key factor in that success.

Simple anecdotes lend credence to their claim. For instance, a couple of years ago we saw Ari Weinzweig give a talk at the Roadhouse. A guest asked him whether it was realistic to expect the average waiter or busboy to understand company strategy and finance. In response, Ari turned to a busboy, who had been oblivious to the conversation: Would the teenager mind sharing Zingerman's vision and indicating how well the restaurant was meeting its weekly goals? Without batting an eye, the busboy stated the vision in his own words and then described how well the restaurant was doing that week on "meals sent back to the kitchen."

While Zingerman's is a fairly small business, much larger ones—such as Whole Foods and the transportation company YRC Worldwide—have also adopted open book management. Systems that make information widely available build trust and give employees the knowledge they need to make good decisions and take initiative with confidence.

Minimizing incivility

The costs of incivility are great. In our research with Christine Pearson, a professor at Arizona State University's

Thunderbird School of Global Management, we discovered that half of employees who had experienced uncivil behavior at work intentionally decreased their efforts. More than a third deliberately decreased the quality of their work. Two-thirds spent a lot of time avoiding the offender, and about the same number said their performance had declined.

Most people have experienced rude behavior at work. Here are a few quotes from our research:

“My boss asked me to prepare an analysis. This was my first project, and I was not given any instructions or examples. He told me the assignment was crap.”

“My boss said, ‘If I wanted to know what you thought, I’d ask you.’”

“My boss saw me remove a paper clip from some documents and drop it in my wastebasket. In front of my 12 subordinates he rebuked me for being wasteful and required me to retrieve it.”

“On speakerphone, in front of peers, my boss told me that I’d done ‘kindergarten work.’”

We have heard hundreds of stories, and they’re sadly familiar to most working people. But we don’t hear so much about the costs.

Incivility prevents people from thriving. Those who have been the targets of bad behavior are often, in turn, uncivil themselves: They sabotage their peers. They “forget” to copy colleagues on memos. They spread gossip to deflect attention. Faced with incivility, employees are likely to narrow their focus to avoid risks—and lose opportunities to learn in the process.

A management consultancy we studied, Caiman Consulting, was founded as an alternative to the larger firms. Headquartered in Redmond, Washington, in offices that are not particularly sleek, the firm is recognized for its civil culture. Background checks in its hiring process include a candidate’s record of civility.

“People leave a trail,” says Caiman’s director, Greg Long. “You can save yourself from a corrosive culture by being careful and conscientious up front.” The managing director, Raazi Imam, told us, “I have no tolerance for anyone to berate or disrespect someone.” When it does happen, he pulls the offender aside to make his policy clear. Long attributes the firm’s 95% retention rate to its culture.

Caiman passes up highly qualified candidates who don’t match that culture. It also keeps a list of consultants who might be good hires when an appropriate spot opens up. The HR director, Meg Clara, puts strong interpersonal

skills and emotional intelligence among her prime criteria for candidates.

At Caiman, as at all companies, managers establish the tone when it comes to civility. A single bad player can set the culture awry. One young manager told us about her boss, an executive who had a habit of yelling from his office “You made a mistake!” for a sin as minor as a typo. His voice would resonate across the floor, making everyone cringe and the recipient feel acutely embarrassed. Afterward, colleagues would gather in a common area for coffee and commiseration. An insider told us that those conversations focused not on how to get ahead at the company or learn to cope by developing a thick skin but on how to get even and get out.

In our research, we were surprised by how few companies consider civility—or incivility—when evaluating candidates. Corporate culture is inherently contagious; employees assimilate to their environment. In other words, if you hire for civility, you’re more likely to breed it into your culture. (See the sidebar [“Individual Strategies for Thriving.”](#))

INDIVIDUAL STRATEGIES FOR THRIVING

Although organizations benefit from enabling employees to thrive, leaders have so much on their plates that attention to this important task can slip.

However, anyone can adopt strategies to enhance learning and vitality without significant organizational support. And because thriving can be contagious, you may find your ideas quickly spreading.

Take a break

Research by Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz has shown that breaks and other renewal tactics, no matter how small, can create positive energy.

In our teaching, we let students design regular breaks and activities into the class to ensure that they stay energized. In one term, students decided to halt every class for two minutes at the midpoint to get up and do something active. Each week a different foursome designed the quick activity—watching a funny YouTube video, doing the cha-cha slide, or playing a game. The point is that the students figure out what is energizing for them and share it with the class.

Even if your organization doesn't offer formal mechanisms for renewal, it's nearly always possible to schedule a short walk, a bike ride, or a quick lunch in the park. Some people write it into their schedules so that meetings can't impinge.

Craft your own work to be more meaningful

You can't ignore the requirements of your job, but you can watch for opportunities to make it more meaningful. Consider Tina, the staff administrator of a policy think tank within a large organization. When her boss took a six-month sabbatical, Tina needed to find a short-term

replacement project. After some scouting, she uncovered a budding initiative to develop staff members' ability to speak up with their ideas about the organization. The effort needed an innovative spirit to kick it off. The pay was lower, but the nature of the work energized Tina. When her boss returned, she renegotiated the terms of her think tank job to consume only 80% of her time, leaving the rest for the staff development project.

Look for opportunities to innovate and learn

Breaking out of the status quo can trigger the learning that is so essential to thriving. When Roger became the head of a prestigious high school in the Midwest, he was brimming with innovative ideas. He quickly ascertained, however, that quite a few staff members were not open to new ways of doing things. He made sure to listen to their concerns and tried to bring them along, but he invested more of his effort in the growth and learning of those who shared his passion for breakthrough ideas. Mentoring and encouraging them, Roger began to achieve small wins, and his initiatives gained some momentum. A few of the resisters ended up leaving the school, and others came around when they saw signs of positive change. By focusing on those bright spots rather than the points of resistance, Roger was able to launch an effort that is propelling the school toward a radically different future.

Invest in relationships that energize you

All of us have colleagues who may be brilliant but are difficult and corrosive to work with. Individuals who thrive look for opportunities to work closely

with colleagues who generate energy and to minimize interaction with those who deplete it. In fact, when we built the research team to study thriving, we chose colleagues we enjoyed, who energized us, with whom we looked forward to spending time, and from whom we knew we could learn. We seek to build good relationships by starting every meeting with good news or expressions of gratitude.

Recognize that thriving can spill over outside the office

There's evidence that high levels of engagement at work will not lessen your ability to thrive in your personal life but instead can enhance it. When one of us (Gretchen) was dealing with her husband's difficult medical diagnosis, she found that her work, even though it was demanding, gave her the energy to thrive professionally and in her family life. Thriving is not a zero-sum game. People who feel energized at work often bring that energy to their lives beyond work. And people inspired by outside activities—volunteering, training for a race, taking a class—can bring their drive back to the office.

Offering performance feedback

Feedback creates opportunities for learning and the energy that's so critical for a culture of thriving. By resolving feelings of uncertainty, feedback keeps people's work-related activities focused on personal and organizational

goals. The quicker and more direct the feedback, the more useful it is.

The Zingerman's huddle, described earlier, is a tool for sharing near-real-time information about individual as well as business performance. Leaders outline daily ups and downs on the whiteboard, and employees are expected to "own" the numbers and come up with ideas for getting back on track when necessary. The huddles also include "code reds" and "code greens," which document customer complaints and compliments so that all employees can learn and grow on the basis of immediate and tangible feedback.

Quicken Loans, a mortgage finance company that measures and rewards employee performance like no other organization, offers continually updated performance feedback using two types of dashboards: a ticker and kanban reports. (*Kanban*, a Japanese word meaning "signal," is used frequently in operations.)

The ticker has several panels that display group and individual metrics along with data feeds that show how likely an employee is to meet his or her daily goals. People are hardwired to respond to scores and goals, so the metrics help keep them energized through the day; essentially, they're competing against their own numbers.

The kanban dashboard allows managers to track people's performance so that they know when an employee

or a team needs some coaching or other type of assistance. A version of the kanban chart is also displayed on monitors, with a rotating list of the top 15 salespeople for each metric. Employees are constantly in competition to make the boards, which are almost like a video game's ranking of high scorers.

Employees could feel overwhelmed or even oppressed by the constant nature of the feedback. Instead, the company's strong norms for civility and respect and for giving employees a say in how they accomplish their work create a context in which the feedback is energizing and promotes growth.

The global law firm O'Melveny & Myers lauds the use of 360-degree evaluations in helping workers thrive. The feedback is open-ended and summarized rather than shared verbatim, which has encouraged a 97% response rate. Carla Christofferson, the managing partner of the Los Angeles offices, learned from her evaluation that people saw her behavior as not matching the firm's stated commitment to work-life balance—which was causing stress among employees. She started to spend more time away from the office and to limit weekend work to things she could do at home. She became a role model for balance, which went a long way toward eliminating the worry of employees who wanted a life outside of work.

The four mechanisms that help employees thrive don't require enormous efforts or investments. What they do require is leaders who are open to empowering employees and who set the tone. As we've noted, each mechanism provides a different angle that's necessary for thriving. You can't choose one or two from the menu; the mechanisms reinforce one another. For example, can people be comfortable making decisions if they don't have honest information about current numbers? Can they make effective decisions if they're worried about being ridiculed?

Creating the conditions for thriving requires your concerted attention. Helping people grow and remain energized at work is valiant on its own merits—but it can also boost your company's performance in a sustainable way.

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The Research We've Ignored About Happiness at Work

By André Spicer and Carl Cederström

Recently, we found ourselves in motivational seminars at our respective places of employment. Both events preached the gospel of happiness. In one, a speaker explained that happiness could make you healthier, kinder, more productive, and even more likely to get promoted.

The other seminar involved mandatory dancing of the wilder kind. It was supposed to fill our bodies with joy. It also prompted one of us to sneak out and take refuge in the nearest bathroom.

Ever since a group of scientists switched the lights on and off at the Hawthorne factory in the mid-1920s, scholars and executives alike have been obsessed with increasing their employees' productivity. In particular, happiness as a way to boost productivity seems to have gained traction in

corporate circles as of late.¹ Firms spend money on happiness coaches, team-building exercises, gameplays, funsultants, and chief happiness officers (yes, you'll find one of those at Google). These activities and titles may appear jovial or even bizarre, but companies are taking them extremely seriously. Should they?

When you look closely at the research—which we did after the dancing incident—it's not clear that encouraging happiness at work is always a good idea. Sure, there is evidence to suggest that happy employees are less likely to leave, more likely to satisfy customers, are safer, and more likely to engage in citizenship behavior.² However, we also discovered alternate findings, which indicates that some of the taken-for-granted wisdoms about what happiness can achieve in the workplace are mere myths.

To start, we don't really know what happiness is or how to measure it. Measuring happiness is about as easy as taking the temperature of the soul or determining the exact color of love. As historian Darrin M. McMahon shows in his illuminating book *Happiness: A History*, ever since the sixth century BC, when Croesus is said to have quipped "No one who lives is happy," this slippery concept has served as a proxy for all sorts of other concepts, from pleasure and joy to plenitude and contentment. Being happy in the moment, Samuel Johnson said, could be achieved only when drunk.³ For Jean-Jacques Rousseau, happiness was to lie in a boat,

drifting aimlessly, feeling like a God (not exactly the picture of productivity). There are other definitions of happiness, too, but they are neither less nor more plausible than those of Johnson or Rousseau.

And just because we have more-advanced technology today doesn't mean we're any closer to pinning down a definition, as Will Davies reminds us in his book *The Happiness Industry*. He concludes that even as we have developed more-advanced techniques for measuring emotions and predicting behaviors, we have also adopted increasingly simplified notions of what it means to be human, let alone what it means to pursue happiness. A brain scan that lights up may *seem* like it's telling us something concrete about an elusive emotion, for example, when it actually isn't.

Happiness doesn't necessarily lead to increased productivity. A stream of research shows some contradictory results about the relationship between happiness—which is often defined as “job satisfaction”—and productivity.⁴ One study on British supermarkets even suggests there might be a negative correlation between job satisfaction and corporate productivity: The more miserable the employees were, the better the profits.⁵ Sure, other studies have pointed in the opposite direction, saying that there is a link between feeling content with work and being productive. But even these studies, when

considered as a whole, demonstrate a relatively weak correlation.

Happiness can also be exhausting. The pursuit of happiness may not be wholly effective, but it doesn't really hurt, right? Wrong. Ever since the eighteenth century, people have been pointing out that the demand to be happy brings with it a heavy burden, a responsibility that can never be perfectly fulfilled. Focusing on happiness can actually make us feel less happy.

A psychological experiment recently demonstrated this.⁶ The researchers asked their subjects to watch a film that would usually make them happy: a figure skater winning a medal. But before watching the film, half of the group was asked to read a statement aloud about the importance of happiness in life. The other half did not read the statement. The researchers were surprised to find that those who had read the statement were actually *less* happy after watching the film. Essentially, when happiness becomes a duty, it can make people feel worse if they fail to accomplish it.

This is particularly problematic at the present era, in which happiness is preached as a moral obligation.⁷ As the French philosopher Pascal Bruckner put it, "Unhappiness is not only unhappiness; it is, worse yet, a failure to be happy."⁸

Happiness won't necessarily get you through the workday. If you've worked in a frontline customer service job, like a call center or a fast food restaurant, you know that being upbeat is not optional—it's compulsory. And as tiring as that may be, it makes some sense when you're in front of customers.

But today, many non-customer-facing employees are also asked to be upbeat. This could have some unforeseen consequences. One study found that people who were in a good mood were worse at picking out acts of deception than those who were in a bad mood.⁹ Another piece of research found that people who were angry during a negotiation achieved better outcomes than people who were happy.¹⁰ This suggests that being happy may not be good for all aspects of our work or for jobs that rely heavily on certain abilities. In fact, in some cases, happiness can actually make our performance worse.

Happiness could damage your relationship with your boss. If we believe that work is where we will find happiness, we might, in some cases, start to mistake our boss for a surrogate spouse or parent. In her study of a media company, researcher Susanne Ekman found that those who expected work to make them happy would often become emotionally needy.¹¹ They wanted their managers to provide them with a steady stream of recognition and emotional reassurance. And when they *didn't* receive the

expected emotional response (which was often), these employees felt neglected and started overreacting. Even minor setbacks were interpreted as being rejected by their bosses. So in many ways, expecting a boss to bring happiness makes us emotionally vulnerable.

Happiness could also hurt your relationships with friends and family. In her book *Cold Intimacies*, sociology professor Eva Illouz points out a strange side effect of people trying to live more emotionally at work: They started to treat their private lives like work tasks. The people she spoke with saw their personal lives as something that needed to be carefully administered using a range of tools and techniques they had learned from corporate life. As a result, their home lives became increasingly cold and calculating. It's no wonder then that many of the people she spoke with preferred to spend time at work rather than at home.

Happiness could make losing your job that much more devastating. When we expect the workplace to provide happiness and meaning in our lives, we become dangerously dependent on it. When studying professionals, sociology professor Richard Sennett noticed that people who saw their employer as an important source of personal meaning were those who became most devastated if they were fired.¹² When these people lost their jobs, they weren't just losing an income—they were losing the

promise of happiness. This suggests that, when we see our work as a great source of happiness, we make ourselves emotionally vulnerable during periods of change. In an era of constant corporate restructuring, this can be dangerous.

Happiness could also make you selfish. Being happy makes you a better person, right? Not so, according to an interesting piece of research.¹³ Participants were given lottery tickets and then given a choice about how many tickets they wanted to give to others and how many they wished to keep for themselves. Those who were in a good mood ended up keeping more tickets for themselves. This implies that, at least in some settings, being happy doesn't necessarily mean we will be generous. In fact, the opposite could be true.

Finally, happiness could also make you lonely. In one experiment, psychologists asked a number of people to keep a detailed diary for two weeks. What they found at the end of the study was that those who greatly valued happiness felt lonelier than those who valued happiness less.¹⁴ It seems that focusing too much on the pursuit of happiness can make us feel disconnected from other people.

So why, contrary to all of this evidence, do we continue to hold on to the belief that happiness can improve a workplace? The answer, according to one study, comes down to aesthetics and ideology. Happiness is a convenient

idea that looks good on paper (the aesthetic part). But it's also an idea that helps us shy away from more serious issues at work, such as conflicts and workplace politics (the ideological part).¹⁵

When we assume that happy workers are better workers, we may sweep more uncomfortable questions under the rug, especially since happiness is often seen as a choice. It becomes a convenient way of dealing with negative attitudes, party poopers, miserable bastards, and other unwanted characters in corporate life. Invoking happiness, in all its ambiguity, is an excellent way of getting away with controversial decisions, such as choosing to let people go. As Barbara Ehrenreich points out in her book *Bright-Sided*, positive messages about happiness have proved particularly popular in times of crisis and mass layoffs.

Given all these potential problems, we think there is a strong case for rethinking our expectation that work should always make us happy. It can be exhausting, make us overreact, drain our personal life of meaning, increase our vulnerability, and make us more gullible, selfish, and lonely. Most striking is that consciously pursuing happiness can actually drain the sense of joy we usually get from the really good things we experience.

In reality, work—like all other aspects of life—is likely to make us feel a wide range of emotions. If your job feels

depressing and meaningless, it might be because it *is* depressing and meaningless. Pretending otherwise can just make it worse. Happiness, of course, is a great thing to experience, but it can't be willed into existence. Maybe the less we seek to actively pursue happiness through our jobs, the more likely we will be to actually experience a sense of joy in our work—a joy that is spontaneous and pleasurable rather than constructed and oppressive. But most important, we will be better equipped to cope with work in a sober manner. To see it for what it is and not what we—whether as executives, employees, or dancing motivational seminar leaders—pretend that it is.

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Notes

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The Happiness Backlash

By Alison Beard

Nothing depresses me more than reading about happiness. Why? Because there's entirely too much advice out there about how to achieve it. As Frédéric Lenoir points out in *Happiness: A Philosopher's Guide* (recently translated from its original French), great thinkers have been discussing this topic for more than 2,000 years. But opinions on it still differ. Just scan the 14,700 titles listed in the "happiness" subgenre of self-help books on Amazon, or watch the 55 TED talks tagged in the same category. What makes us happy? Health, money, social connection, purpose, "flow," generosity, gratitude, inner peace, positive thinking . . . research shows that any (or all?) of the above answers are correct. Social scientists tell us that even the simplest of tricks—counting our blessings, meditating for 10 minutes a day, forcing smiles—can push us into a happier state of mind.

And yet for me and many others, happiness remains elusive. Of course, I sometimes feel joyful and content—reading a bedtime story to my kids, interviewing someone I greatly admire, finishing a tough piece of writing. But despite having good health, supportive family and friends, and a stimulating and flexible job, I’m often awash in negative emotions: worry, frustration, anger, disappointment, guilt, envy, regret. My default state is dissatisfied.

The huge and growing body of happiness literature promises to lift me out of these feelings. But the effect is more like kicking me when I’m down. I know I should be happy. I know I have every reason to be and that I’m better off than most. I know that happier people are more successful. I know that just a few mental exercises might help me. Still, when I’m in a bad mood, it’s hard to break out of it. And—I’ll admit—a small part of me regards my nonbliss not as unproductive negativity but as highly productive realism. I can’t imagine being happy all the time; indeed, I’m highly suspicious of anyone who claims to be.

I agreed to write this essay because over the past several years I’ve sensed a swell of support for this point of view. Barbara Ehrenreich’s 2009 book *Bright-Sided*, about the “relentless promotion” and undermining effects of positive thinking, was followed last year by *Rethinking*

Positive Thinking, by the NYU psychology professor Gabriele Oettingen, and *The Upside of Your Dark Side*, by two experts in positive psychology, Todd Kashdan and Robert Biswas-Diener. This year brought a terrific *Psychology Today* article by Matthew Hutson titled “Beyond Happiness: The Upside of Feeling Down”; *The Upside of Stress*, by Stanford’s Kelly McGonigal; *Beyond Happiness*, by the British historian and commentator Anthony Seldon; and *The Happiness Industry: How the Government and Big Business Sold Us Well-Being*, by another Brit, the Goldsmiths lecturer in politics William Davies.

Are we finally seeing a backlash against happiness? Sort of. Most of these recent releases rail against our modern obsession with *feeling* happy and *thinking* positively. Oettingen explains the importance of damping sunny fantasies with sober analysis of the obstacles in one’s way. Kashdan and Biswas-Diener’s book and Hutson’s article detail the benefits we derive from all the negative emotions I cited earlier; taken together, those feelings spur us to better our circumstances and ourselves. (The Harvard psychologist Susan David, a coauthor of the HBR article “Emotional Agility,” also writes thoughtfully on this topic.)

McGonigal shows how viewing one unhappy condition—stress—in a kinder light can turn it into something that improves rather than hurts our health. Those who accept

feeling stressed as the body's natural response to a challenge are more resilient and live longer than those who try to fight it.

Seldon describes his own progression from pleasure seeking to more-meaningful endeavors that bring him (and should bring us) joy. Sadly, he trivializes his advice by alphabetizing it: Accepting oneself; Belonging to a group; having good Character, Discipline, Empathy, Focus, Generosity, and Health; using Inquiry; embarking on an inner Journey; accepting Karma; and embracing both Liturgy and Meditation. (One wonders what he'll use for X and Z in the next book.)

Davies comes at the issue from a different angle. He's fed up with organizational attempts to tap into what is essentially a "grey mushy process inside our brains." In his view, there's something sinister about the way advertisers, HR managers, governments, and pharmaceutical companies are measuring, manipulating, and ultimately making money from our insatiable desire to be happier.

But none of these authors is arguing against individuals' aspiring to have a generally happy life. We call that the pursuit of "happiness," but what we really mean is "long-term fulfillment." Martin Seligman, the father of positive psychology, calls it "flourishing" and said years ago that positive emotion (that is, feeling happy) is only one element of it, along with engagement, relationships,

meaning, and achievement. In the parlance Arianna Huffington uses in her recent book, it's "thriving," and Lenoir, whose history of happiness philosophy is probably the most enlightening and entertaining of the bunch, describes it as simply "love of life." Who can argue against any of those things?

Where most of the happiness gurus go wrong is insisting that daily if not constant happiness is a means to long-term fulfillment. For some glass-half-full optimists, that may be true. They can "stumble on happiness" the way the field's most prominent researcher, Dan Gilbert, suggests; or gain "the happiness advantage" that the professor-turned-consultant Shawn Achor talks about; or "broadcast happiness," as Michelle Gielan, Achor's wife and partner at the firm GoodThink, recommends in her new book. As I said, it apparently takes just a few simple tricks.

But for the rest of us, that much cheer feels forced, so it's unlikely to help us mold meaningful relationships or craft the perfect career. It certainly can't be drawn out of us by employers or other external forces. We pursue fulfillment in different ways, without reading self-help books. And I suspect that in the long run we'll be OK—perhaps even happy.

ALISON BEARD is a senior editor at *Harvard Business Review*.

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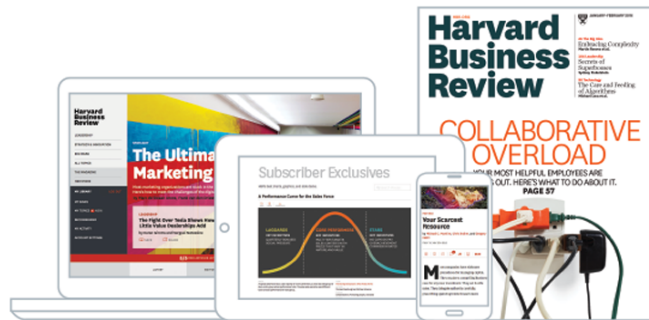
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Confidence

HBR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE SERIES

How to Build Confidence

By Amy Gallo

Very few people succeed in business without a degree of confidence. Yet everyone, from young people in their first real jobs to seasoned leaders in the upper ranks of organizations, have moments—or days, months, or even years—when they are unsure of their ability to tackle challenges. No one is immune to these bouts of insecurity at work, but they don't have to hold you back.

What the experts say

“Confidence equals security equals positive emotion equals better performance,” says Tony Schwartz, the president and CEO of The Energy Project and the author of *Be Excellent at Anything: The Four Keys to Transforming the Way We Work and Live*. And yet he concedes that “insecurity plagues consciously or subconsciously every

human being I've met." Over-coming this self-doubt starts with honestly assessing your abilities (and your shortcomings) and then getting comfortable enough to capitalize on (and correct) them, adds Deborah H. Gruenfeld, the Moghadam Family Professor of Leadership and Organizational Behavior and Codirector of the Executive Program for Women Leaders at Stanford Graduate School of Business. Here's how to do that and get into the virtuous cycle that Schwartz describes.

Prepare

Your piano teacher was right: Practice does make perfect. "The best way to build confidence in a given area is to invest energy in it and work hard at it," says Schwartz. Many people give up when they think they're not good at a particular job or task, assuming the exertion is fruitless. But Schwartz argues that deliberate practice will almost always trump natural aptitude. If you are unsure about your ability to do something—speak in front of a large audience, negotiate with a tough customer—start by trying out the skills in a safe setting. "Practice can be very useful and is highly recommended because, in addition to building confidence, it also tends to improve quality. Actually deliver the big presentation more than once before the due date. Do a dry run before opening a new store," says Gruenfeld.

Even people who are confident in their abilities can become more so with better preparation.

Get out of your own way

Confident people aren't only willing to practice, they're also willing to acknowledge that they don't—and can't—know everything. “It's better to know when you need help than not,” says Gruenfeld. “A certain degree of confidence—specifically, confidence in your ability to learn—is required to be willing to admit that you need guidance or support.”

On the flip side, don't let modesty hold you back. People often get too wrapped up in what others will think to focus on what they have to offer, says Katie Orenstein, founder and director of The OpEd Project, a nonprofit that empowers women to influence public policy by submitting opinion pieces to newspapers. “When you realize your value to others, confidence is no longer about self-promotion,” she explains. “In fact, *confidence* is no longer the right word. It's about purpose.” Instead of agonizing about what others might think of you or your work, concentrate on the unique perspective you bring.

Get feedback when you need it

While you don't want to completely rely on others' opinions to boost your ego, validation can also be very effective in building confidence. Gruenfeld suggests asking someone

who cares about your development as well as the quality of your performance to tell you what she thinks. Be sure to pick people whose feedback will be entirely truthful; Gruenfeld notes that when performance appraisals are only positive, we stop trusting them. And then use any genuinely positive commentary you get as a talisman.

Also remember that some people need more support than others, so don't be shy about asking for it. "The White House Project finds, for example, that many women need to be told they should run for office before deciding to do so. Men do not show this pattern of needing others' validation or encouragement," says Gruenfeld. It's okay if you need praise.

Take risks

Playing to your strengths is a smart tactic but not if it means you hesitate to take on new challenges. Many people don't know what they are capable of until they are truly tested. "Try things you don't think you can do. Failure can be very useful for building confidence," says Gruenfeld. Of course, this is often easier said than done. "It feels bad to not be good at something. There's a leap of faith with getting better at anything," says Schwartz. But don't assume you should feel good all the time. In fact, stressing yourself is the only way to grow. Enlisting help from others can make this easier. Gruenfeld recommends asking

supervisors to let you experiment with new initiatives or skills when the stakes are relatively low and then to support you as you tackle those challenges.

Principles to remember

Do:

- Be honest with yourself about what you know and what you still need to learn
- Practice doing the things you are unsure about
- Embrace new opportunities to prove you can do difficult things

Don't:

- Focus excessively on whether or not you have the ability—think instead about the value you provide
- Hesitate to ask for external validation if you need it
- Worry about what others think—focus on yourself, not a theoretical and judgmental audience

Case study #1: Get the knowledge and get out of your own way

In 2010, Mark Angelo was asked by the CEO of Hospital for Special Surgery in New York to create and implement a program to improve quality and efficiency. Mark was

relatively new to the organization. He had worked as a business fellow for the previous year but had recently taken on the role of director of operations and service lines. Even though he had background in operations strategy from his days as a management consultant, he was not familiar with the Lean/Six Sigma principles he'd need to use for this project and didn't feel equipped to build the program from scratch. He was particularly concerned he wouldn't be able to gain the necessary support from the hospital's physicians and nurses. What would they think of a young administrator with no hospital experience telling them how to improve quality and increase efficiency?

For five months, Mark struggled to get the project on track, and his confidence suffered. He knew that his apprehension was in part due to his lack of knowledge of Six Sigma. He read a number of books and articles on the subject, talked to consultants who specialized in it, and spoke with hospitals that had been successful in developing and implementing similar programs. This helped, but he realized he still didn't know if he would be able to get the necessary people on board. "I was anxious and stressed because I had no idea how I was going to transform the organization. I knew I couldn't do it on my own. It was going to take a collective effort that included our management team and all of our staff," he said.

He talked with the CEO, who had supported him since the beginning. He also looked to his family for emotional support. Through these conversations, he realized that his anxiety stemmed from a desire to be liked by his colleagues and therefore to avoid conflict. “After many discussions with my CEO and observing how he handled these situations, I learned that it is better to strive to be well-respected than well-liked,” he said.

This was a turning point for Mark. Instead of worrying so much about what others thought of him, he focused on doing what was best for the patient and the institution. In December, he presented the vision for the program to the entire medical staff. While he was nervous about how it would be received, he knew this was a critical moment. “I was able to get up in front of one of our toughest constituencies and present the vision that we had been developing over the past few months,” he says. His presentation was met with applause. “In the end, my confidence grew by leaps and bounds and we were able to design a program that has since taken off with great success across the hospital. I was able to overcome my mental blocks and knowledge deficits to build a program that will truly help transform how we approach performance improvement and patient care,” he says.

Case study #2: Know the value you bring

Julie Zhuo knew she had things to say, but she wasn't sure how to get heard. As a product design manager at Facebook, she had developed valuable expertise in the products she worked on. Yet she lacked the confidence to share her ideas. She was used to being one of very few women in the room. That had been the case when she was studying computer science at Stanford, and it was still true now that she was at Facebook. She knew this meant she needed to make a concerted effort to speak up. But being the minority voice wasn't the only reason she felt unsure of herself. She says that she also suffered from "imposter syndrome," feeling as if she hadn't earned a right to her ideas—that she had somehow ended up where she was accidentally, not through hard work.

Julie was intrigued when someone in HR told her about a workshop offered at Stanford by the OpEd Project. After attending and getting positive feedback about her ideas, Julie tried something she had never thought to do before: write an op-ed.

In November 2010, she published a piece in the *New York Times* entitled "Where Anonymity Breeds Contempt" about the danger of anonymity in online discussions. "It was a matter of someone saying 'You can do it,'" she explains. "It had never occurred to me that I could be published. But it actually wasn't hard at all." The reaction she got in the workshop and afterward back at Facebook

boosted her confidence. Since then, she's gotten a lot of support from colleagues, which has emboldened her to speak her mind. "Of course it's still a work in progress, but now I'm a much more confident speaker and writer," she says.

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Overcome the Eight Barriers to Confidence

By Rosabeth Moss Kanter

To get a more confident you—or a more confident company, community, family, or team—first know what gets in the way. The best resolutions will go nowhere without the confidence to stick with them.

Confidence is an expectation of a positive outcome. It is not a personality trait; it is an assessment of a situation that sparks motivation. If you have confidence, you're motivated to put in the effort, to invest the time and resources, and to persist in reaching the goal. It's not confidence itself that produces success; it's the investment and the effort. Without enough confidence, it's too easy to give up prematurely or not get started at all. Hopelessness and despair prevent positive action.

To muster the confidence to work toward your goals, avoid these eight traps:

Self-defeating assumptions. You think you can't, so you don't. A British Olympic runner is so rattled by a misstep that cost her a contest that she dropped out of the next event. A company team decides that a popular world leader is so far out of their league that they don't invite him to speak at their customer event. Talented women sometimes "leave before they leave," as Sheryl Sandberg puts it, assuming that they won't be promoted (or succeed when they have children) so they start behaving like they're departing years before departure, thus foreclosing their options. It's one thing to be realistic, it's another to behave like a loser before entering the game.

Goals that are too big or too distant. I know how often leaders say they want to tackle BHAGs—"big hairy audacious goals." But having only enormous goals can actually undermine confidence. The gap between a giant goal and today's reality can be depressing and demotivating. Confidence comes from small wins that occur repeatedly, with each small step moving you closer to the big goal. But the small steps must be valued and turned into goals themselves. Winners think small as well as big.

Declaring victory too soon. This is the dieter's dilemma: You lose the first few pounds and feel so good that you reward yourself with chocolate cake—then when the pounds go

back on, you feel so discouraged that you have more cake to feel better. I saw this pattern in a college football team that was coming off a nine-year losing streak (yes, nine years!). After winning its first game in nearly a decade, a team member shouted, “Now we’ll win the championship!” First, of course, they had to win the next game—which they didn’t. Step-by-step discipline builds confidence.

Do-it-yourself-ing. It’s a trap to think you can go it alone, without a support system and without supporting others. Losing teams have stars, but they focus on their own records, not how well the whole team does; the resulting resentments and inequalities provoke internal battles that drag everyone down. To build your confidence, think about building the confidence of others and creating a culture in which everyone is more likely to succeed, whether through mentoring them or recognizing their strengths. Giving to others boosts happiness and self-esteem, as numerous research studies show. Supporting them makes it easier to ensure that they support you.

Blaming someone else. Confidence rests on taking responsibility for one’s own behavior. Even in difficult circumstances, we have choices about how to respond to adversity. Whining about past harms reduces confidence about future possibilities. When the blame game is carried out within

companies, everyone loses confidence, including external stakeholders. Confidence is the art of moving on.

Defensiveness. It's one thing to listen and respond to critics; it's another to answer them before they've done anything. Don't defend yourself if you're not being attacked. Apologize for your mistakes, but don't apologize for who or what you are. Instead, take pride in where you've come from and lead with your strengths.

Neglecting to anticipate setbacks. Confidence involves a dose of reality. It is not blind optimism, thinking that everything will be fine no matter what. Confidence stems from knowing that there will be mistakes, problems, and small losses en route to big wins. After all, even winning sports teams are often behind at some point in the game. Confidence grows when you look at what can go wrong, think through alternatives, and feel you are prepared for whatever might happen.

Overconfidence. Confidence is a sweet spot between despair and arrogance. Don't let confidence slip over into the arrogant end. Overconfidence is the bane of economies (e.g., the irrational exuberance that preceded the global financial crisis), corrupt leaders (who assume they're so necessary that they won't get into trouble for a small expense account fudge), or individuals who swagger and

feel entitled to success rather than working for it. Arrogance and complacency lead to neglect of the basics, deaf ears to critics, and blindness to the forces of change—a trap for companies as well as individuals. Sure enough, like the old proverb, “Pride goeth before a fall,” the slide into a losing streak often begins with a winning streak. A little humility goes a long way to moderate arrogance and keep just the right amount of confidence.

Remember, it’s not enough just to *feel* confident. You have to do the work. But with an expectation of success, you can try new things, form new partnerships, contribute to shared success, and revel in small wins that move you toward bigger goals.

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Everyone Suffers from Impostor Syndrome —Here's How to Handle It

By Andy Molinsky

One of the greatest barriers to moving outside your comfort zone is the fear that you're a poser, that you're not worthy, that you couldn't possibly be qualified to do whatever you're aiming to do. It's a fear that strikes many of us: *impostor syndrome*.

I know I've certainly had those thoughts while publishing pieces of writing, whether it's blogs or books. I've had them while teaching my first university classes and giving speeches to corporate audiences. I appear confident on the outside but feel deeply insecure on the inside, wondering who I am to be stepping up to this stage. What could I possibly have to say that anyone would want to hear?

And I'm not alone. Actress (and Harvard alum) Natalie Portman described the self-doubt she experienced as a Harvard student in a poignant commencement speech several years ago. "I felt like there had been some mistake," she said, "that I wasn't smart enough to be in this company, and that every time I opened my mouth I would have to prove that I wasn't just a dumb actress." Howard Schultz, the former executive chairman and CEO of Starbucks, revealed that he and CEOs he knows feel the same way: "Very few people, whether you've been in that job before or not, get into the seat and believe today that they are now qualified to be the CEO. They're not going to tell you that, but it's true."¹

What can you do to overcome these feelings of inadequacy that so many of us experience?

A first tip is something that Portman highlights in her Harvard address, which I've found quite helpful: Recognize the benefits of being a novice. You might not realize it, but there are great benefits to being new in your field. When you are not steeped in the conventional wisdom of a given profession, you can ask questions that haven't been asked before or approach problems in ways others haven't thought of.

It's no surprise, for example, that some of the best research ideas I get as a professor come from undergraduate students with little previous experience,

people who can think with a fresh outsider's perspective. This is true in business as well. The pharmaceutical company Eli Lilly has created a crowdsourcing platform called InnoCentive, through which outside innovators are paid to solve vexing problems the company faces. And it works! In fact, according to a study by Karim Lakhani of Harvard Business School, many problems are solved by those from outside the field in question—physicists solving chemistry problems, for example.² So the next time you feel inadequate in a particular domain, remember that as an outsider to the role in question, you might have the most critical perspective of all.

A second tip for combating impostor syndrome is to focus more on what you're learning than on how you're performing. According to psychologist Carol Dweck, the feelings that impostor syndrome leaves you with are ones we might actually be able to control.³ With a *performance mindset*, which people suffering from impostor syndrome often have, you tend to see your feelings of inadequacy or the mistakes you make as evidence of your underlying limitations. This mindset only fuels the concerns you have about being unfit for your job. But there's something you can work to cultivate instead: a *learning mindset*. From this perspective, your limitations are experienced quite differently. Your mistakes are seen as an inevitable part of

the learning process rather than as more evidence of your underlying failings.

That brings us to the third tip: Understand the power of perspective. Those of us who experience impostor syndrome often feel like we're the only ones feeling this way, but reality is very different. Early in my career, when I walked into a networking event, I was convinced that I was the only one worried about making small talk with strangers. But over time, I've realized that practically everyone in the room shares that same concern. According to a recent survey by Vantage Hill Partners, being found incompetent is the number-one fear of executives worldwide.⁴ So if you're feeling like an impostor, chances are that others in your situation feel the exact same way. Or, as Tina Fey once quipped, "I've realized that almost everyone is a fraud, so I try not to feel too bad about it."⁵

It may not be easy, but overcoming impostor syndrome is possible—you don't need to feel helpless or alone. Next time you're in a situation that feels completely outside your comfort zone, don't focus on your failures. Consider it your opportunity to learn from your missteps and to bring forth a new perspective that others may not have.

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Cultures Without Losing Yourself in the Process and Reach: A New Strategy to Help You Step Outside Your Comfort Zone, Rise to the Challenge, and Build Confidence.

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Mental Preparation Secrets of Top Athletes

An interview with Daniel McGinn by Sarah Green Carmichael

Sarah Green Carmichael: *Welcome to the HBR Idea Cast from Harvard Business Review. I'm Sarah Green Carmichael. To get psyched up for the big game, sports teammates give each other pep talks, listen to an exciting song during warm-ups, or follow a particular pregame routine. Then there's a locker-room speech, often dramatized in popular movies, where the coach inspires individuals to greatness:*

*[Excerpt from **Miracle**]:*

Herb Brooks: I'm sick and tired of hearing about what a great hockey team the Soviets have. Screw them. This is your time. Now go out there and take it.

But what's the business equivalent of the pep talk? When you have a big presentation, job interview, quarter-ending

sales meeting, or situation where you really need to be on, how do you prepare for it? If you're like a lot of people, you probably think about what you're going to say and what you're going to wear, and then you just kind of, well, show up.

HBR's senior editor Dan McGinn thinks we can all do better than that by taking a cue from how the best athletes and performers prepare. He's the author of the article "The Science of Pep Talks" in the July-August 2017 issue of Harvard Business Review, and he is also the author of the book Psyched Up: How the Science of Mental Preparation Can Help You Succeed. Dan, thank you for joining us today.

Daniel McGinn: Thank you, Sarah.

So did you have to get psyched up to write this book?

I did, actually. Writing this book did change the way I get ready to perform my job as a writer every morning or many mornings. If you watch sports, you become pretty accustomed to seeing the athletes and what they do when they warm up. They tend to have headphones on, and you know that they're listening to a certain set of songs. It's not just up to chance. You're used to seeing locker-room speeches. You're used to seeing

that gaze, that locked-in look that they have, and that focus.

And they're taught to do that. There are sports psychologists who teach them exactly what they should be thinking about before a game. The argument I have is that more of our jobs are like that these days. It's less like factory work where you're doing the same thing every day and more about the big pitch, the presentation, the sales call, and that we should learn to do what these athletes do to try to lock ourselves in.

I think about coming into my job every day and that maybe we should run through the halls and give every editor a high five and then chew a pen and then put the pen back in the bin or other crazy things. How feasible is it to do some of these things on a daily basis?

Yeah, obviously, if our boss Adi Ignatius gave us a speech like Knute Rockne did before we sat down to edit articles, we would all think it was kind of crazy. If you don't know who that is, Rockne was the legendary Notre Dame football coach from the 1920s.

So why do people have rituals? And why is there a lot of research that suggests that they work? Well, one theory is that they help us remember how much practice we've done. They help get our bodies and our minds into the groove. The other is that they give us

something to focus on other than being nervous and anxious. Think of a funeral. Funerals are very awkward occasions, and there's this whole set of rituals about what we do when we go through it. That's because it's awkward, and we want something to do to not think about the nervousness.

So there's a distractive element to rituals. They just help your body get into the groove. I'm not suggesting that we should run out and chest bump every day before we go to our desks. But I am saying that if you have some quiet, maybe private, thing that you do to get your day started, you might be a little bit better at it.

So a lot of what athletes and performers do is about reducing their pregame jitters. But isn't some amount of anxiety supposed to help you amp up for a big moment?

Yeah, no question. I was not a very good high school athlete. And when I started this reporting, I thought a lot of this was about adrenaline and about getting yourself psyched up, amped up, highly energized. The more research I did, the more I found out that that's really a simplistic view.

Adrenaline is a physiological response. But it's much more about what you're feeling, and it's about reducing your anxiety, trying to boost your confidence, and

trying to manage your energy level so that it's appropriate to what you're trying to do. If you're a WWE wrestler, that's a little bit different than giving a commencement address. So you need to calibrate the energy level to make sure it's right for what you're doing.

What about trying to increase your confidence, though? I mean, can these rituals and things really help with that? Or is it like the movie Dumbo, where little Dumbo had that silly feather and thought that's how he could fly? Is it just that this helps me because I believe it helps me?

Yeah, so the feather would be an example of a superstitious ritual because clearly the feather doesn't really help him fly. It's just a placebo effect. What can help you gain confidence is controlling your thought patterns and thinking about what I'd call your "greatest hits." So, Sarah, for the show, if you were going to get yourself psyched up, you should think about the best podcast interviews you've done. You might actually want to go back for five minutes at your desk and listen to a couple of them.

Before I walked in the room with you today, I went back and listened to the best interview I've had with you because it made me think, "Gosh, you're good at this." And that's what you want to be thinking before

you go into these environments. It sounds cheesy. You may remember the Stuart Smalley self-affirmations from *Saturday Night Live* in the '90s: "I'm special . . . People like me." But it does work. The messages there are to be relentlessly upbeat and positive. Be confident. Remember your greatest hits. And basically talk yourself up and psych yourself up with the idea that you've done this before, and you can do it again.

Was there any organization you came across where they really do make you go back and actually listen to or watch your greatest hits?

At the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, I spent a day in what they call the Center for Enhanced Performance, which is a team of psychologists that work at West Point. And one of the things they do is take their athletes and their cadets and put them in these enclosed, almost egg-shaped chairs. And they play audio tracks that they've created for each cadet that talk about how great they are.

The one I watched was a lacrosse goalie, and there's a professional actor narrating along with music: "John, you're the best lacrosse goalie ever. Remember the game against Shrewsbury High when you did this?" So it really is a greatest-hits kind of thing. That's probably

the most tangible, visceral example I have found of that.

Could it ever work so well that you'd get to a point where you were insanely overconfident and then that would actually lead you to perform worse?

Sure. I think in a sports setting or in a business setting, we certainly see examples of organizations that become overconfident, too convinced of their dominance, too complacent. But I think for your average, everyday business performers thinking about a job interview, a pitch scenario, a big presentation, or a negotiation, probably the average person suffers a little bit too much from a lack of confidence or an imposter syndrome. On the whole, most people are going to benefit from trying to dial it up a little bit.

One of the things in the book that really surprised me was the part where you explain that golfers who used Tiger Woods's clubs or clubs they were told were Tiger Woods's clubs—I'm not sure he participated in the study—actually golfed better than players who were just using any old random club. How does something like that work?

They call that process “social contagion,” and it's the theory that knowing that someone celebrated or highly accomplished has touched an object physically imbues

some magical powers. I tried to test that out in the book. I reached out to Malcolm Gladwell, who's a very well-known and acclaimed nonfiction writer. I asked him if I could write the book on a keyboard that he had used. Knowing that such a great writer has typed on these same keys and struggled through it absolutely helped me. I don't know if Tiger Woods's club would help my golf game though. My golf game is really beyond help. [Laughter]

Yes, I've actually read about similar studies—I'm not sure how good they are—that show that when women wear heels, they feel more confident. I think in my case, the opposite is true, because I have a really hard time walking in heels. But that's something where if you are Stephen Colbert or David Ortiz or one of these big stars you talk about in the book, you can really control your environment so that you can perform the ritual. But I think for most of us in offices, it feels like we're not in control of our space. So how can those of us who are not David Ortiz or Stephen Colbert really carve out time for these rituals that are so powerful?

They don't have to be super-elaborate, and they don't have to be something that anyone else can even recognize you're doing. So I don't do this every day, but

I'll put on a pair of noise-canceling headphones. That has a functional purpose because it blocks out noise, but also the feel of it on my head is a signal to myself that it's time to get to work here. Some of it is just this Pavlovian signal to our bodies that, "OK, it's time for me to get to work." So it doesn't need to be throwing chalk dust in the air or crazy hand gestures. It can be something as simple as putting something on.

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Adapted from "Mental Preparation Secrets of Top Athletes, Entertainers, and Surgeons" on *HBR IdeaCast* (podcast), June 29, 2017.

Research: Learning a Little About Something Makes Us Overconfident

By Carmen Sanchez and David Dunning

As former baseball pitcher Vernon Law once put it, experience is a hard teacher because it gives the test first, and only then provides the lesson.

Perhaps this observation can explain the results of a survey sponsored by the Association of American Colleges & Universities. Among college students, 64% said they were well prepared to work in a team, 66% thought they had adequate critical thinking skills, and 65% said they were proficient in written communication. However, among employers who had recently hired college students, fewer than 40% agreed with any of those statements. The students thought they were much further along in the learning curve toward workplace success than their future employers did.¹

Overconfidence among beginners

Our research focuses on overconfidence as people tackle new challenges and learn. To be a beginner is to be susceptible to undue optimism and confidence. Our work is devoted to exploring the exact shape and timeline of that overconfidence.

One common theory is that beginners start off overconfident. They start a new task or job as “unconscious incompetents,” not knowing what they don’t know. Their inevitable early mistakes and miscues prompt them to become conscious of their shortcomings.

Our work, however, suggests the opposite. Absolute beginners can be perfectly conscious and cautious about what they don’t know; the unconscious incompetence is instead something they grow into. A little experience replaces their caution with a false sense of competence.

Specifically, our research focused on the common task of probabilistic learning in which people learn to read cues from the environment to predict some outcome.² For example, people must rely on multiple signals from the environment to predict which company’s stock will rise, which applicant will do the best job, or which illness a patient is suffering from. These can be hard tasks—and even the most expert of experts will at times make the

wrong prediction—but a decision is often essential in many settings.

In a laboratory study, we asked participants to imagine they were medical residents in a post-apocalyptic world that has been overrun by zombies. (We were confident that this would be a new scenario to all our participants, allowing them all to start as total novices.) Their job, over 60 repeated trials, was to review the symptoms of a patient, such as whether the patient had glossy eyes, an abscess, or brain inflammation, and diagnose whether the patient was healthy or infected with one of two zombie diseases. Participants needed to learn, by trial and error, which symptoms to rely on to identify zombie infections. Much as in a real-world medical diagnosis of a (non-zombie) condition, the symptoms were informative but fallible clues. There were certain symptoms that made one diagnosis more likely, but those symptoms were not always present. Other potential symptoms were simple red herrings. Participants diagnosed patients one at a time, receiving feedback after every diagnosis.

The beginner's bubble

We found that people slowly and gradually learned how to perform this task, though they found it quite challenging. Their performance incrementally improved with each patient.

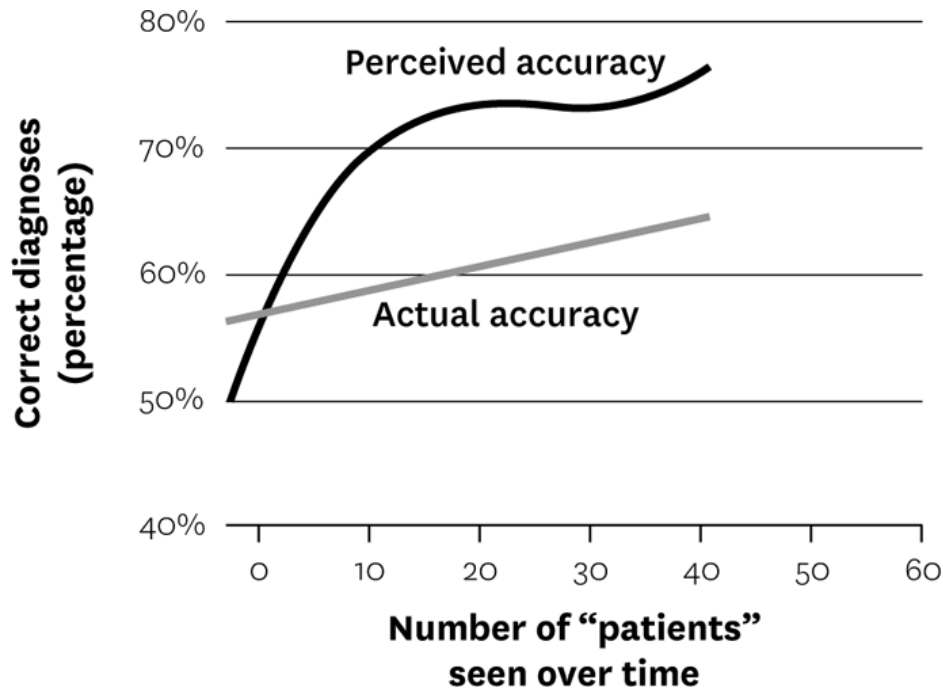
Confidence, however, took quite a different journey. In each study, participants started out well-calibrated about how accurate their diagnoses would prove to be. They began thinking they were right 50% of the time, when their actual accuracy rate was 55%. However, after just a few patients, their confidence began skyrocketing, far ahead of any accuracy they achieved. Soon, participants estimated their accuracy rate was 73% when it had not hit even 60%. (See [figure 1](#).)

It appears that Alexander Pope was right when he said that a little learning is a dangerous thing. In our studies, just a little learning was enough to make participants feel they had learned the task. After a few tries, they were as confident in their judgments as they were ever going to be throughout the entire experiment. They had, as we termed it, entered into a “beginner’s bubble” of overconfidence.

FIGURE 1

Total novices lack confidence, but as their confidence grows, it outpaces accuracy

In a lab experiment, “doctors” quickly began to overestimate their diagnostic ability.



*Source: “Overconfidence Among Beginners: Is a Little Learning a Dangerous Thing?” by Carmen Sanchez and David Dunning, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2018.*

What produced this quick inflation of confidence? In a follow-up study, we found that it arose because participants far too exuberantly formed quick, self-assured ideas about how to approach the medical diagnosis task based on only the slimmest amount of data. Small bits of data, however, are often filled with noise and misleading signs. It usually

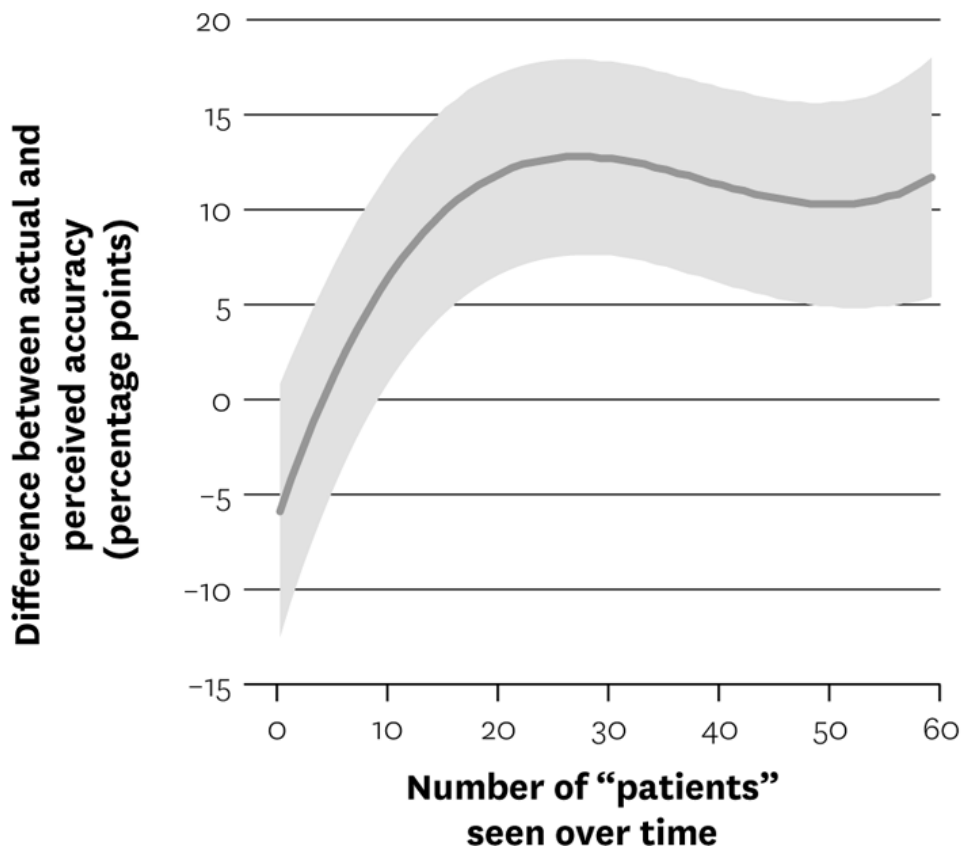
takes a large amount of data to strip away the chaos of the world, to finally see the worthwhile signal. However, classic research has shown that people do not have a feel for this fact.³ They assume that every small sequence of data represents the world just as well as long sequences do.

But our studies suggested that people do eventually learn—somewhat. After participants formed their bubble, their overconfidence often leveled off and slightly declined. People soon learned that they had to correct their initial, frequently misguided theories, and they did. But after a correction phase, confidence began to rise again, with accuracy never rising enough to meet it. It is important to note that although we did not predict the second peak in confidence, it consistently appeared throughout all of our studies. (See [figure 2](#).)

FIGURE 2

Overconfidence declines—slightly—with experience

But according to a lab experiment mimicking hospital visits, you can't keep it down for long.



Source: "Overconfidence Among Beginners: Is a Little Learning a Dangerous Thing?" by Carmen Sanchez and David Dunning, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2018.

A real-world bubble

The real world follows this pattern. Other research has found that doctors learning to do spinal surgery usually do not begin to make mistakes until their 15th iteration of the

surgery.⁴ Similarly, beginning pilots produce few accidents—but then their accident rate begins to rise until it peaks at about 800 flight hours, where it begins to drop again.⁵

We also found signs of the beginner's bubble outside of the laboratory. As with probabilistic learning, it has been shown that most people under the age of 18 have little knowledge of personal finance.⁶ Most primary and secondary educational systems do not teach financial literacy. As such, personal finance is something most learn by trial and error.

We found echoes of our laboratory results across the life span in surveys on financial capability conducted by the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority.⁷ Each survey comprised a nationally representative sample of 25,000 respondents who took a brief financial literacy test and reported how knowledgeable about personal finance they believed they were. Much like in the laboratory, both surveys showed that real financial literacy rose slowly, incrementally, and uniformly across age groups.

Self-confidence, however, surged between late adolescence and young adulthood, then leveled off among older respondents until late adulthood, where it began to rise again—a result perfectly consistent with our laboratory pattern.

It is important to note that our work has several limitations. In our experiments, participants received

perfect feedback after each trial. In life, consistent feedback like this is often unavailable. Also, our tasks traced how confidence changed as people learned truly novel tasks. There are plenty of tasks people learn in which they can apply previous knowledge to the new task. We do not know how confidence would change in these situations. Relatedly, we cannot be certain what would happen to overconfidence after the 60th trial.

With that said, our studies suggest that the work of a beginner might be doubly hard. Of course, the beginner must struggle to learn—but the beginner must also guard against an illusion they have learned too quickly. Perhaps Alexander Pope suggested the best remedy for this beginner's bubble when he said that if a few shallow draughts of experience intoxicate the brain, the only cure was to continue drinking until we are sober again.

CARMEN SANCHEZ is a PhD candidate in Social and Personality Psychology at Cornell University. She studies how perceptions of abilities change as people learn, cultural differences in self-enhancement, and financial decision-making. **DAVID DUNNING** is a Professor of Psychology at the University of Michigan. His research focuses on the psychology of human misbelief, particularly false beliefs people hold about themselves.

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To Ace Your Job Interview, Get into Character and Rehearse

By Cathy Salit

You've landed an interview for the job of your dreams. You're ideally suited for the position, and your resume is bulletproof. You've researched the company, the culture, the job, and the person who will be interviewing you. (Thank you, LinkedIn.) You've got your answers ready and selling points lined up. But when the interview starts, something's "off." You want to be commanding, but your nervousness gets in the way. Your voice sounds stiff. You hear yourself trying too hard, but you can't seem to stop yourself. As the minutes tick by, your answers sound more and more like canned monologues. And your interviewer isn't warming up—the job opportunity is slipping, slipping, slipping out of reach.

What went wrong?

As I see it, you probably prepared your content well, but—like many people—you didn't prepare something equally, if not more important: your *performance*. Yes, performance, the theatrical kind. Just as an actor prepares the character they will play on stage or screen, you can steal some tricks from the actor's toolbox to prepare the character you will play in the interview. For this kind of scene, you'll need to exude confidence, competence, likability, flexibility, and more. How to do this in a high-stakes situation? Tap into your natural ability to imagine and pretend—and craft your character.

"But wait a minute," you say. "Character? Pretend? What about being my authentic self?"

I get asked about that a lot, and it's a good question—many job coaches and experts extol authenticity, values-based behavior, and being "genuine" at work.

My company's own two decades of practice and research have focused on what we call the "Becoming Principle," in which the tools of theatrical performance give us the transformative power to become who we are not . . . yet. When we consciously use our capacity to pretend and perform, we can grow new—and genuine—parts of ourselves. (The Latin verb in the word pretend is *tendere*, literally to stretch, not to fake or wear a mask.) This idea resonates with the findings of Herminia Ibarra in her landmark HBR article, "The Authenticity Paradox." Ibarra

writes that our adherence to one “true self” can hold us back as we take on new challenges and bigger roles. In other words, by sticking to “your story,” you’re limiting yourself.

In the job interview, you are literally *auditioning* for a new role. Developing your skills as a performer will help you not only to land the job, it will also help you grow and gain a new skill that is critical in the 21st-century workplace—navigating constant change that requires flexibility and new performances all the time.

Who do you want to be in this scene? That’s where your “job interview character” comes in. Make a list of the qualities the successful candidate should convey. To some extent, these qualities will depend on the particular job you are applying for—a software engineer and a sales director will need to emphasize different leading attributes. And you’ll want to convey in your performance that you have a feel for the company’s culture—a laid-back dude vibe could be a turn-off in a formal environment, and vice versa.

Skilled interviewers will often be looking for the qualities that are known to correlate with success on the job, such as confidence, energy, and positive body language. How to physically act out these personal qualities? Much has been written about the body language of confidence and how specific gestures such as physical stance, tone, handshake, and eye contact instantly

communicate both ease and authority. If you are not sure how to portray these qualities, look for others who seem to embody them, then observe, closely, how they do it. You're not looking to slavishly copy, but rather creatively imitate them. Try it on, try it out, and see what works for you.

Most important—rehearse! Like any good performer, you need to practice in advance. If you tend to be shy, expand your range of expression (and what you're comfortable doing) by practicing what might feel like an exaggerated performance, using hand gestures and passion. If you talk a lot using run-on sentences with no period at the end (a lot of us do this when we're nervous), practice pausing and breaking your thoughts into short sentences.

Even with practice and rehearsal, we can get overloaded and stressed in new situations, particularly when we're the center of attention and under scrutiny. That's why I suggest that—in addition to those outlined above—your job interview character have a special trait: Instead of performing as a person who is trying really hard to get the job, perform as someone who wants to have a *great conversation* with the human being across from you.

Your mindset is more like *I've done some cool and interesting things in my life and work that I'd love to share, and I'm really interested to hear about you and your*

company. In other words, you'll play the role of a *good conversationalist*. Here's how:

- *Be curious*. Most people talk too much during an interview. Instead, perform curiosity—ask open-ended (not yes or no) questions that are connected to what you just heard. This will help you discover common ground with your interviewer, which is key to making a great first impression.
- *Accept every conversational offer*. Of course you need to prepare “talking points” for your interview. But being in a conversation (instead of delivering a rehearsed pitch) means creating back-and-forth repartee. That means you can do what improvisers do, and treat everything the interviewer says or does as an “offer”—which you should accept and build upon (rather than waiting for them to finish so that you can fire off another talking point). You can practice this kind of listening today, by starting every sentence with the words “yes, and . . .” Improv skills are now highly valued in the workplace. And in an interview, this fundamental improv technique will make you less focused on proving yourself and much more attuned to the other person.

- *Prepare to tell stories.* This may be one of the most powerful elements of a great conversationalist performance. The ancient art of storytelling has a powerful effect on stirring empathic emotions and boosting your own likeability. Prepare and practice yours in advance so that when the interviewer asks if you're experienced in leading projects, you can tell the story in a way that dramatizes the most recent project you led. Describe how the project began, what you did, the obstacles you faced and how you overcame them. Good stories have a beginning, middle, and end. Make them short, but pack a punch.

Some of these techniques won't feel like "you"—and that's the point. By making use of your natural ability to perform in new ways, you're expanding your comfort zone and increasing your repertoire of what feels natural. This is how you grow. It's how you become *who you are not yet*. It's also how you get the job.

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Six Ways to Look More Confident During a Presentation

By Kasia Wezowski

Several years ago, colleagues and I were invited to predict the results of a startup pitch contest in Vienna, where 2,500 tech entrepreneurs were competing to win thousands of euros in funds. We observed the presentations, but rather than paying attention to the ideas the entrepreneurs were pitching, we were watching the body language and microexpressions of the judges as they listened.

We gave our prediction of who would win before the winners were announced and, as we and the audience soon learned, we were spot on. We had spoiled the surprise.

Two years later, we were invited back to the same event, but this time, instead of watching the judges, we observed the contestants. Our task was not to guess the

winners, but to determine how presenters' nonverbal communication contributed to their success or failure.

We evaluated each would-be entrepreneur on a scale from 0 to 15. People scored points for each sign of positive, confident body language, such as smiling, maintaining eye contact, and persuasive gesturing. They lost points for each negative signal, such as fidgeting, stiff hand movements, and averted eyes. We found that contestants whose pitches were rated in the top eight by competition judges scored an average of 8.3 on our 15-point scale, while those who did not place in that top tier had an average score of 5.5. Positive body language was strongly correlated with more successful outcomes.

We've found similar correlations in the political realm. During the 2012 U.S. Presidential election, we conducted an online study in which 1,000 participants—both Democrats and Republicans—watched two-minute video clips featuring Barack Obama and Mitt Romney at campaign events delivering both neutral and emotional content. Web-cams recorded the viewers' facial expressions, and our team analyzed them for six key emotions identified in psychology research: happy, surprised, afraid, disgusted, angry, and sad. We coded for the tenor of the emotion (positive or negative) and how strongly it seemed to be expressed. This analysis showed that Obama sparked stronger emotional responses and

fewer negative ones. Even a significant number of Republicans—16%—reacted negatively to Romney. And when we analyzed the candidates' body language, we found that the president's resembled those of our pitch contest winners. He displayed primarily open, positive, confident positions congruent with his speech. Romney, by contrast, often gave out negative signals, diminishing his message with contradictory and distracting facial expressions and movement.

Of course, the election didn't hinge on body language. Nor did the results of the startup competition. But the right kinds of nonverbal communication did correlate with success.

How can you send out the same signals—and hopefully generate the same success? At the Center for Body Language, we've studied successful leaders across a range of fields and identified several positions which are indicators of effective, persuasive body language.

The box

Early in Bill Clinton's political career, he would punctuate his speeches with big, wide gestures that made him appear untrustworthy. To help him keep his body language under control, his advisers taught him to imagine a box in front of his chest and belly and contain his hand movements within

it. Since then, “the Clinton box” has become a popular term in the field.

The box: Trustworthy, truthful



Source: Center for Body Language.

Holding the ball: Commanding, dominant



Source: Center for Body Language.

Holding the ball

Gesturing as if you were holding a basketball between your hands is an indicator of confidence and control, as if you almost literally have the facts at your fingertips. Steve Jobs frequently used this position in his speeches.

Pyramid hands: Self-assured, relaxed



Source: Center for Body Language.

Pyramid hands

When people are nervous, their hands often flit about and fidget. When they're confident, they are still. One way to accomplish that is to clasp both hands together in a relaxed pyramid. Many business executives employ this gesture, though beware of overuse or pairing it with domineering or arrogant facial expressions. The idea is to show you're relaxed, not smug.

Wide stance: Confident, in control



Source: Center for Body Language.

Wide stance

How people stand is a strong indicator of their mindset. When you stand in this strong and steady position, with your feet about a shoulder width apart, it signals that you feel in control.

Palms up: Honest, accepting



Source: Center for Body Language.

Palms up

This gesture indicates openness and honesty. Oprah makes strong use of this during her speeches. She is a powerful, influential figure, but also appears willing to connect sincerely with the people she is speaking to, be it one person or a crowd of thousands.

Palms down: Strong, assertive



Source: Center for Body Language.

Palms down

The opposite movement can be viewed positively too—as a sign of strength, authority and assertiveness. Barack Obama has often used it to calm a crowd right after moments of rousing oration.

The next time you give a presentation, try to have it recorded, then review the video with the sound off, watching only your body language. How did you stand and

gesture? Did you use any of these positions? If not, think about how you might do so the next time you're in front of an audience, or even just speaking to your boss or a big client. Practice in front of a mirror, then with friends, until these positions feel natural.

Nonverbal communication won't necessarily make or break you as a leader, but it might help you achieve more successful outcomes.

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You Don't Just Need One Leadership Voice —You Need Many

By Amy Jen Su

We often equate developing a leadership voice with finding ways to appear more confident. We assume that our success depends on mimicking someone else, increasing our self-promotion, or saying things more loudly than others. But rather than living with imposter's syndrome, or feeling exhausted by wearing your game face all day, you can build a truer confidence by more intentionally focusing on cultivating many different parts of your leadership voice each day. Ultimately, you should cultivate enough parts of your voice so that no matter the leadership situation or audience you find yourself facing, you can respond in an authentic, constructive, and effective way. So, what are the various voices to access within yourself and cultivate over time? And what are the situations that warrant each voice?

Your voice of character

First and foremost, consider the voice of your character. This is the part of your voice that is constant and consistent. It is grounded in fundamental principles about whom you choose to be and what guides and motivates your interactions with others. I've had leaders share that they hold key leadership principles in mind such as "Give the benefit of the doubt," "Don't take things personally," "Focus on what's best for the business," or "Be direct with respect" when walking into a difficult conversation, meeting, or potential conflict. Anchoring ourselves in the character we know we have keeps us from becoming chameleons, acting out of a fight-or-flight reaction, or only showing respect when there is a commercial gain or benefit—while being uncivil to others who we believe are of less value. A voice of character is ultimately about who you are and the intentions and motivations that guide your speech and actions.

Your voice of context

As you take on increasingly senior roles, your view and perspective of the business grow. You hold more of the big picture. Part of the job then becomes finding ways to express and communicate that bigger picture to others. Too often, in the race against time, we dive right into the

details of a presentation, meeting, or conversation without taking an extra few minutes to appropriately set the stage and share critical context. Places where you can bring more of your voice of context include:

- Sharing vision, strategy, or upcoming organizational change with others
- Presenting to executives, and being clear on what you are there for and what you need
- Kicking off a meeting with your team and giving the bigger picture for the topic at hand
- Making your decision-making criteria or rationale transparent to others

Your voice of clarity

In a world of high-intensity workplaces, you have the opportunity to be the voice of clarity and help your team stay focused on the most important priorities. Leaders who envision new possibilities, muse aloud, or have knee-jerk reactions run the risk of teams trying to deliver on their every whim; these teams end up scattered, spread thin, and unfocused, falling short on delivering on the most important wins. Here are a few ways you can be the voice of clarity to help channel others' energies more productively:

- At the start of the year, sit down with each direct report to prioritize and clarify what the big wins are in each of their areas. One client of mine shared how she asks each team member: “If we were to publish this in a newspaper, what would you want the big headlines to be for you and your team at the end of the year?”
- Periodically come back to helping your direct reports reprioritize what’s on their plates. You can do this in one-on-one meetings or with your entire team.
- Empower your team to say no.

Your voice of curiosity

As a leader, you have a responsibility to give direction, share information, and make important decisions. But you need to be sure that you’re not approaching every situation as if you have all the answers or as if you need to advise on, problem-solve, or fix everything in front of you. In many cases, being the voice of curiosity is a better choice for the situation. As one of my clients once shared about facing pushback from others, “While I’m confident in my own business judgment and instincts, I know that my organization has hired really smart people. Therefore, if one of my peers or team members has a different perspective or pushes back, I don’t take it personally. I get really curious to understand where they are coming from

first so that we can get to the best solution.” Some situations where bringing your voice of curiosity can help you and your colleagues move forward:

- When you’re engaging in work that is interdependent, and a better solution will come from hearing all perspectives in the room before coming to a final decision
- When you’re coaching a direct report, asking good questions to help them grow in new ways, explore issues they’re facing, or support their career development
- When you’re in a difficult conversation where hearing out the other person is an important part of defusing emotion, understanding each party’s needs and views, and then figuring out the best way forward

Your voice of connection

As your span of control or influence grows, it can become increasingly more difficult to make a connection with a broadening set of colleagues, strategic networks, and teams. We often have folks working for us many layers deep into the organization, such that we no longer know everyone in our area and still must find ways to stay connected and visible. Being a voice of connection can

come in many forms. Some of the ways I've seen others do this effectively:

- Increase your skill as a storyteller. Stories make our points more memorable and salient. They can enliven a keynote address or an all-hands meeting, drive home a point we're making in a presentation, or help to close a large deal or transaction.
- Thank and acknowledge. Our teams and colleagues often go to great lengths to ensure that deliverables are met, revenues are strong, and customers are satisfied. When we use our voice of connection, we remember to express gratitude to a team that worked through the holidays to close on the financials at the end of the quarter, or we remember to loop back with a colleague who made a valuable introduction or referral for us.
- Making time for a few minutes of icebreaking or rapport building at the start of a conversation or meeting. So often, we want to get right down to business, so we skip the niceties or pleasantries that help to build relationships with others. Where possible, and especially with colleagues who value that kind of connection, spend a couple of minutes to connect before diving into the work. On days where you're crunched for time, state that up front and transparently, so as not to create any

misunderstandings. You can say something like: “I’m a little crunched for time today, so it would be great if we could dive right in.”

Discovering and developing your voice as a leader is the work of a lifetime. The key is to stay open to an increasingly wide array of new situations and people. Use each situation as an opportunity to access more parts of your voice, rather than having a one-size-fits-all approach. Bring your voices of character, context, clarity, curiosity, and connection as the moment or situation warrants. Through this kind of learning and growth, not only will you increase your inner confidence and resilience, but you will also inspire the confidence of others around you in a more authentic and impactful way.

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Cultivate a Culture of Confidence

By Rosabeth Moss Kanter

One difference between winners and losers is how they handle losing.

Even for the best companies and most accomplished professionals, long track records of success are punctuated by slips, slides, and mini-turnarounds. Even the team that wins the game might make mistakes, fumble, and lag behind for part of it. That's why the ability to recover quickly and get back on course is so important.

Troubles are ubiquitous. Surprises can fall from the sky like volcanic ash and appear to change everything. New ventures can begin with great promise and still face unexpected obstacles, unanticipated delays, and critics that pop up at the wrong moment. That's why I coined Kanter's Law: "Anything can look like a failure in the middle."

Nothing succeeds for long without considerable effort and constant vigilance. Winning streaks end for predictable reasons: Strategies run their course. New competition emerges to take on the industry leader. Ideas get dusty. Technology marches on. Complacency sets in, making people feel entitled to success rather than motivated to work for it.

Thus, a key factor in high achievement is bouncing back from the low points. Long-term winners often face the same problems as long-term losers, but they respond differently, as I found in the research for my book *Confidence*. I compared companies and sports teams with long winning streaks and long losing streaks, and then looked at how leaders led turnarounds from low to high performance.

Consider first the pathologies of losing. Losing produces temptations to behave in ways that make it hard to recover fast enough—and could even make the situation worse. For example, panicking and throwing out the game plan. Scrambling for self-protection and abandoning the rest of the group. Hiding the facts and hoping that things will get better by themselves before anyone notices. Denying that there is anything to learn or change. Using decline as an excuse to let facilities or investments deteriorate.

The culture and support system that surrounds high performers helps them avoid these temptations. They can put troubles in perspective because they are ready for them. They rehearse through diligent practice and preparation; they remain disciplined and professional. Their leaders put facts on the table and review what went right or wrong in the last round in order to shore up strengths and pinpoint weaknesses and to encourage personal responsibility for actions. They stress collaboration and teamwork—common goals; commitment to a joint vision; respect and support for team members, so when someone drops the ball, someone else is there to pick it up—and responsibility for mentoring, so the best performers lift everyone's capabilities. They seek creative ideas for improvement and innovation, favoring widespread dialogue and brainstorming.

Resilience is not simply an individual characteristic or a psychological phenomenon. It is helped or hindered by the surrounding system. Teams that are immersed in a culture of accountability, collaboration, and initiative are more likely to believe that they can weather any storm. Self-confidence, combined with confidence in one another and in the organization, motivates winners to make the extra push that can provide the margin of victory.

The lesson for leaders is clear: Build the cornerstones of confidence—accountability, collaboration, and initiative

—when times are good and achievement comes easily. Maintain a culture of confidence as insurance against the inevitable downturns. And while no one should deliberately seek failure, remember that performance under pressure—the ability to stay calm, learn, adapt, and keep on going—separates winners from losers.

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Great Leaders Are Confident, Connected, Committed, and Courageous

By Peter Bregman

Brad was leading a difficult turnaround of his company and had decided to fire his head of sales, who was a nice guy but wasn't performing.

Three months later, he still hadn't fired him.

I asked him why. His answer? "I'm a wimp!"

Brad (not his real name—I've changed some details to protect people's privacy) is the CEO of a financial services firm and is most definitely not a wimp. He's a normal human, just like you and me. And he's struggling to follow through on an important, strategic decision. Just like, at times, you and I do.

No matter your age, your role, your position, your title, your profession, or your status, to get your most important

work done, you have to have hard conversations, create accountability, and inspire action.

In order to do that, you need to show up powerfully and magnetically in a way that attracts people to trust you, follow you, and commit to putting 100% of their effort into a larger purpose, something bigger than all of you. You need to care about others and connect with them in such a way that they feel your care. You need to speak persuasively—in a way that's clear, direct, and honest and that reflects your care—while listening with openness, compassion, and love. Even when being challenged.

And, of course, you need to follow through quickly and effectively.

In 25 years of working with leaders to do all of the above, I have found a pattern that I share in my book, *Leading with Emotional Courage*, consisting of four essential elements that all great leaders rely on to rally people to accomplish what's important to them. To lead effectively—really, to *live* effectively—you must be confident in yourself, connected to others, committed to purpose, and emotionally courageous.

Most of us are great at only one of the four. Maybe two. But to be a powerful presence—to inspire action—you need to excel at *all four simultaneously*.

If you're confident in yourself but disconnected from others, everything will be about you and you'll alienate the

people around you. If you're connected to others but lack confidence in yourself, you will betray your own needs and perspectives in order to please everyone else. If you're not committed to a purpose, something bigger than yourself and others, you'll flounder, losing the respect of those around you as you act aimlessly, failing to make an impact on what matters most. And if you fail to act powerfully, decisively, and boldly—with emotional courage—your ideas will remain idle thoughts and your goals will remain unfulfilled fantasies.

Let's apply this to Brad and identify precisely where and how he was getting stuck.

Confident in yourself

Brad struggled with this element, which might feel surprising since he was so successful in his career. But this is not uncommon. He worked tremendously hard, but it came from some degree of insecurity—he wanted to prove himself and please those around him. He became unnerved in the face of potential failure and was not particularly gentle or compassionate with himself when he did fail. He did have important strengths in this element: He saw the person he wanted to become and he worked toward that future, putting aside distractions and investing his energy wisely and strategically.

Connected to others

This was Brad's greatest strength. He was well-loved and always took great care of his team. People clearly knew and felt that he trusted them, even when he disagreed with them. They appreciated his curiosity—about people and problems—and were grateful that he did not draw quick conclusions about them. All that said, even in this element, he had room to grow: He was not always direct with people and tended to procrastinate on difficult conversations.

Committed to purpose

This was a mixed element for Brad. On the one hand, Brad was clear about what needed to get done to grow the firm, he engaged people in the early stages of work, and he was open and willing to ask for help. On the other hand, he was somewhat scattered. He wasn't clear enough about the small number of things that would move the needle, and he didn't have a reliable process for staying focused on the most important things, ensuring accountability and driving follow-through. Not firing his head of sales sent a mixed message to his team—was he really serious about the firm's success?

Emotionally courageous

Brad had room to grow here, and it turned out to be an important element for growing his strength in the other three elements. Risks, by definition, make us feel vulnerable, and Brad avoided that feeling. He resisted the

unknown and intentionally avoided uncomfortable situations. This made it hard for him to tell people hard truths and make hard decisions quickly, which stalled his actions.

So Brad's strongest element was "connected to others," followed by "committed to purpose." He was weaker in "confident in yourself" and "emotionally courageous."

Which puts his challenge in perspective: His connection to his head of sales was at war with his commitment to the success of his team and company. Meanwhile, his confidence in himself and his emotional courage weren't strong enough to break the tie. That's a recipe for inaction and painful frustration.

Just knowing what was happening helped him immediately. We spent some time strengthening his emotional courage by taking small risks *while* feeling the emotions he had been trying to keep at bay. Each time he followed through, regardless of whether he succeeded, he obviously survived and also felt the accomplishment of addressing the risk itself. Which, of course, built his confidence. Which helped him take bigger risks.

In a short time, he felt prepared (even though he may never have felt "ready") to follow through on what he had known he needed to do for the past three months. With his

natural care, compassion, and humanity, he fired his head of sales (who, by the way, and unsurprisingly, knew it was coming and said he felt “relieved”).

Brad was extremely uncomfortable going into the conversation—that’s almost always the feeling you’ll have when you do anything that requires emotional courage.

But using emotional courage builds your emotional courage. Brad emerged from the conversation stronger in all four elements: He was more confident in himself, more connected to his team (and even, believe it or not, his head of sales), more committed to purpose, and more emotionally courageous.

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Helping an Employee Overcome Their Self-Doubt

By Tara Sophia Mohr

You want to give a member of your team a stretch assignment, but she tells you she's just "not ready yet"—she'd like to get more experience before taking it on.

You offer to make a valuable introduction for someone you mentor. He seems excited about it at first, but doesn't follow up. Later, you discover that he felt intimidated, like he'd have nothing to say.

As managers and mentors, we frequently encounter situations like these, when we come up against the limiting voices of self-doubt in the people we support.

The negative impact of that voice is tremendous. If someone on your team is hampered by a harsh inner critic, they're likely to talk themselves out of sharing their ideas and insights. Held back by self-doubt, some of your most

talented people will shy away from leading projects or teams, or put off going for the big opportunities—new clients, new business lines, innovative moves—that could help your business grow.

As a manager or mentor, one of the most powerful ways you can unlock your people's potential is to give them a tool kit for managing self-doubt.

The manager's common mistake

Typically, managers and mentors make this mistake: They think their job is to encourage, compliment, or cheerlead when their people are struggling with self-doubt. They say things like, "You really *can* do this!" or "I have complete confidence in you. I wouldn't have given you this role if I didn't think you had the capability to do it."

In the coaching field, this is known as "arguing with the inner critic." It's the dialogue between someone's voice of self-doubt ("*I can't do that, I don't have what it takes, etc.*") and the affirming words of a supportive person who has a different perspective ("*Yes you can! You are great!*").

Coaches-in-training are taught, "Never, never argue with the client's inner critic." It's understood that such arguments are usually a waste of everyone's time, for two reasons.

First, such reassurance rarely is convincing. The inner critic's view is not based in data but in instinctual, over-

reactive fears of vulnerability and failure. Hearing another individual say something along the lines of “No, you’re great at that!” often doesn’t speak to those underlying fears. In fact, it can *add* to the stressful feelings of being an imposter, as in, “No one around me realizes that I *really* don’t know what I’m doing, and they are all counting on me, thinking I can pull this off—but I can’t!”

Second, if you help team members and mentees through their self-doubt by giving them compliments or reassurances, the solution requires your presence or the presence of someone like you. You’re giving your people fish, but you aren’t teaching them *how* to fish. You haven’t given them tools to navigate self-doubt on their own. That’s what they really need, because they will make most of their inner-critic-driven decisions quickly, in their own heads, without talking to anyone.

An alternative approach

The alternative is to take the conversation up a level. Instead of arguing with your team members’ inner critics, you can introduce a conversation *about* self-doubt—what it is, why it shows up for each of us, and how it can impact what you achieve as a team. You can start to do this with a couple of steps.

1. *Introduce the idea of the “inner critic.”* You might choose to call it imposter syndrome, the voice of self-doubt, monkey mind, or another term you feel is appropriate for your work context.

What’s key is to introduce the concept of a voice in all of our heads that does not reflect realistic thinking, and that anxiously and irrationally underestimates our own capabilities. There are common qualities of the inner critic’s voice you can use to help your people identify their critics: a voice that critiques harshly, is irrational or untrue, sounds like a broken record, or makes arguments about what’s in your best interest, for instance.¹ You can also use the table “Get to know your inner critic” to talk about the difference between the inner critic and more realistic thinking.

2. *Ask your team members to start developing the skill of managing their inner critics.* Clarify that you understand that fears and self-doubts will naturally come up when your team members or mentees grow into new roles, take on greater responsibility, or speak up. The goal you want them to work toward is not unfailing confidence but more-skillful management of their own limiting beliefs and self-doubts.

In doing this, you are introducing a powerful new idea: that readiness for advancement and leadership does not depend on an innate quality of confidence but

rather on building the skill of managing one's own self-doubts.

To do this, they should practice noticing when they're hearing their critic, and to name the critic's thoughts as such when they occur. That's as simple as noting to oneself, "I'm hearing my inner critic's worries about this again."

Get to know your inner critic

How the voice in your head compares with realistic thinking.

Inner critic	Realistic thinking
• Very sure it knows the truth of the situation • Asks yes/no questions: <i>"Is it possible?"</i> • Focuses on problems • Sounds anxious and pessimistic in tone • Thinks in extreme, black-and-white terms • Is repetitive	• Curious and conscious of the many unknowns in the situation • Asks open-ended questions: <i>"How might this be possible?" "What part is possible?"</i> • Seeks solutions • Sounds calmer and generative in tone • Able to see subtlety and gray • Is forward-moving

Typically, once someone understands the fear-based roots of the critic's voice and is conscious of when it's speaking up, they can choose to not take direction from it and to take

direction from more resourceful and rational parts of themselves instead.

One woman in my course, a manager at a telecommunications company, brought a small group of her colleagues together for this conversation. One colleague told her afterward, “I knew I had a little, mean, nagging voice inside my head, but until now I hadn’t really appreciated how much impact it had on the choices I make.” Another realized she was not applying for an available promotion largely because of her inner critic. After the discussion, she applied for the job—and got it.

Grace, an executive at a professional services firm, worked with a manager who was dealing with major changes in the scope of her role, activating the manager’s inner critic. “In addition to encouraging her,” Grace said, “we spent time digging through how the changes had triggered her inner critic. We made a clear plan for what she needed to accomplish. Many milestones were reached (and celebrated), but when things didn’t go to plan, we explored whether/how the manager’s inner critic was factoring in. As time went on, the manager learned to better predict when her inner critic might kick in and how it could be quieted. She gained a tool she can rely on and navigated challenging times of change with flying colors.”

You want your people to do all that they are capable of—to keep saying “yes” to being on their growing edge. That

means they'll frequently feel self-doubt. You can empower them by addressing the inner critic head-on, and you can give them tools to become skillful responders to their own self-doubt.

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To Seem Confident, Women Have to Be Seen as Warm

By Margarita Mayo

Why are there so few women in leadership roles? My research collaborators (Laura Guillén of ESMT and Natalia Karelaia of INSEAD) and I believe we have shed some new light on this conundrum. But first, some background.

One frequently cited reason has to do with confidence. In a previous study, my colleagues and I found that women tend to rate their abilities accurately, while men tend to be overconfident about theirs.¹ Thus, one argument goes, women are less confident than men, which hurts their chances of promotion.

Previous research has measured how women see themselves, but we wanted to know how outside perceivers—bosses, subordinates, colleagues—rate women's confidence, and what influences those ratings.

Susan Fiske and her colleagues have shown that people seem to universally use two dimensions to judge others: competence and warmth.² We decided to test for both of those in addition to confidence. As a proxy for the likelihood of being promoted, we also tested for influence, on the theory that people who are seen as influential are more likely to be promoted to leadership roles.

We conducted a study analyzing the judgments that colleagues made regarding the competence and warmth of 236 engineers working in project teams at a multinational software development company.³ As part of their performance evaluation, the engineers were evaluated online by their supervisor, peers, and collaborators on competence and warmth. A total of 810 raters provided this confidential evaluation. A year later, we collected a second wave of data on the same 236 engineers about their apparent confidence at work and their influence in the organization. This time, a total of 1,236 raters provided information.

Our study shows that men are seen as confident if they are seen as competent, but women are seen as confident only if they come across as both competent and warm. Women must be seen as warm in order to capitalize on their competence and be seen as confident and influential at work; competent men are seen as confident and influential whether they are warm or not.

In other words, for male engineers, competence and perceived confidence go hand in hand. The more competent male engineers are, the more confident they are seen as being (and vice versa). The more confident they are seen as being, the more influence they have in the organization, regardless of whether others like them. It seems that warmth is irrelevant to men appearing confident and influential, at least when they are performing a typically male job like engineering.

For women, in the absence of warmth there was virtually no relationship between competence and confidence ratings. When women were seen as both warm and competent, they were also seen as more confident—and thus more influential. Competent but less-affable female engineers were evaluated by their colleagues as less confident in their professional roles. These female engineers were, in turn, less influential within the organization. In sum, women's professional performance is not evaluated independently from their personal warmth.

Personal experience and empirical research suggest that it's not enough for women to be merely *as* gregarious, easygoing, sociable, and helpful as men. To get credit for being warm—and to have their other strengths recognized—they might need to be even more so.

I still remember my first performance evaluation as an assistant lecturer: I was told to be more “nurturing.” I had

gone to just as many social events as the men had, had been just as gregarious with my students. But women simply are expected to show more warmth. Studies show, for example, that women's performance reviews contain nearly twice as much language about being warm, empathetic, helpful, and dedicated to others.⁴

To us, this study suggests that if women are to succeed in a biased world, encouraging them to be more confident is not enough. To get credit for having confidence and competence, and to have the influence in their organizations that they would like to have, women must go out of their way to be seen as warm.

We wish this were not the case. We wish women and men could be evaluated according to the same meritocratic standards. But as our research shows, we seem to be a long way off from those days.

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Why Do So Many Incompetent Men Become Leaders?

By Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic

There are three popular explanations for the clear underrepresentation of women in management: They are not capable; they are not interested; or they are both interested and capable, but they are unable to break the glass ceiling, an invisible career barrier based on prejudiced stereotypes that prevents women from accessing the ranks of power. Conservatives and chauvinists tend to endorse the first; liberals and feminists prefer the third; and those somewhere in the middle are usually drawn to the second. But what if they have all missed the big picture?

In my view, the main reason for the unbalanced gender ratio in management is our inability to discern between confidence and competence. That is, because we (people in

general) commonly misinterpret displays of confidence as a sign of competence, we are fooled into believing that men are better leaders than women. In other words, when it comes to leadership, the only advantage that men have over women (from Argentina to Norway and the USA to Japan) is the fact that manifestations of hubris—often masked as charisma or charm—are commonly mistaken for leadership potential and that these occur much more frequently in men than in women.¹

This is consistent with the finding that leaderless groups have a natural tendency to elect self-centered, overconfident, and narcissistic individuals as leaders and that these personality characteristics are not equally common in men and women.² In line with this, Freud argued that the psychological process of leadership occurs because a group of people—the followers—have replaced their own narcissistic tendencies with those of the leader, such that their love for the leader is a disguised form of self-love or a substitute for their inability to love themselves. “Another person’s narcissism,” he said, “has a great attraction for those who have renounced part of their own . . . as if we envied them for maintaining a blissful state of mind.”

The truth of the matter is that pretty much anywhere in the world, men tend to *think* that they are much smarter than women.³ Yet arrogance and over-confidence are

inversely related to leadership talent—the ability to build and maintain high-performing teams and to inspire followers to set aside their selfish agendas in order to work for the common interest of the group. Indeed, whether in sports, politics, or business, the best leaders are usually humble—and whether through nature or nurture, humility is a much more common feature in women than men. For example, women outperform men on emotional intelligence, which is a strong driver of modest behaviors.⁴ Furthermore, a quantitative review of gender differences in personality involving more than 23,000 participants in 26 cultures indicated that women are more sensitive, considerate, and humble than men, which is arguably one of the least counterintuitive findings in the social sciences.⁵ An even clearer picture emerges when one examines the dark side of personality: For instance, our normative data, which includes thousands of managers from across all industry sectors and 40 countries, shows that men are consistently more arrogant, manipulative, and risk-prone than women.⁶

The paradoxical implication is that the same psychological characteristics that enable male managers to rise to the top of the corporate or political ladder are actually responsible for their downfall. In other words, what it takes to *get* the job is not just different from, but also the reverse of, what it takes to *do the job well*. As a

result, too many incompetent people are promoted to management jobs, and promoted over more competent people.

Unsurprisingly, the mythical image of a “leader” embodies many of the characteristics commonly found in personality disorders, such as narcissism (Steve Jobs or Vladimir Putin), psychopathy (fill in the name of your favorite despot here), histrionic tendencies (Richard Branson or Steve Ballmer), or a Machiavellian personality (nearly any federal-level politician). The sad thing is not that these mythical figures are unrepresentative of the average manager, but that the average manager will fail precisely for having these characteristics.

In fact, most leaders—whether in politics or business—fail. That has always been the case: The majority of nations, companies, societies, and organizations are poorly managed, as indicated by their longevity, revenues, and approval ratings, or by the effects they have on their citizens, employees, subordinates, or members. Good leadership has always been the exception, not the norm.

So it struck me as a little odd that so much of the recent debate over getting women to “lean in” has focused on getting them to adopt more of these dysfunctional leadership traits. Yes, these are the people we often choose as our leaders—but should they be?

Most of the character traits that are truly advantageous for effective leadership are predominantly found in those who fail to impress others with their talent for management. This is especially true for women. There is now compelling scientific evidence supporting the notion that women are more likely to adopt more-effective leadership strategies than are men. Most notably, in a comprehensive review of studies, Alice Eagly and colleagues showed that female managers are more likely to elicit respect and pride from their followers, communicate their vision effectively, empower and mentor subordinates, and approach problem solving in a more flexible and creative way (all characteristics of “transformational leadership”), as well as fairly reward direct reports.⁷ In contrast, male managers are statistically less likely to bond or connect with their subordinates, and they are relatively less adept at rewarding them for their actual performance. Although these findings may reflect a sampling bias that requires women to be more qualified and competent than men in order to be chosen as leaders, there is no way of really knowing until this bias is eliminated.

In sum, there is no denying that women’s path to leadership positions is paved with many barriers, including a very thick glass ceiling. But a much bigger problem is the lack of career obstacles for incompetent men, and the fact that we tend to equate leadership with the very

psychological features that make the average man a more inept leader than the average woman.⁸ The result is a pathological system that rewards men for their incompetence while punishing women for their competence, to everybody's detriment.

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Less Confident People Are More Successful

By Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic

There is no bigger cliché in business psychology than the idea that high self-confidence is key to career success. It is time to debunk this myth. In fact, *low* self-confidence is more likely to make you successful.

After many years of researching and consulting on talent, I've come to the conclusion that self-confidence is only helpful when it's low. Sure, *extremely* low confidence is not helpful: It inhibits performance by inducing fear, worry, and stress, which may drive people to give up sooner or later. But just-low-enough confidence can help you recalibrate your goals so they are (a) more realistic and (b) attainable. Is that really a problem? Not everyone can be CEO of Coca-Cola or the next Steve Jobs.

If your confidence is low, rather than extremely low, you stand a better chance of succeeding than if you have

high self-confidence. There are three main reasons for this:

Lower self-confidence makes you pay attention to negative feedback and be self-critical. Most people get trapped in their optimistic biases, so they tend to listen to positive feedback and ignore negative feedback. Although this may help them come across as confident to others, in any area of competence (e.g., education, business, sports, or performing arts) achievement is 10% performance and 90% preparation. Thus, the more aware you are of your soft spots and weaknesses, the better prepared you will be.

Low self-confidence may turn you into a pessimist, but when pessimism teams up with ambition it often produces outstanding performance. To be the very best at anything, you will need to be your own harshest critic, and that is almost impossible when your starting point is high self-confidence. Exceptional achievers always experience low levels of confidence and self-confidence, but they train hard and practice continually until they reach an acceptable level of competence. Indeed, success is the best medicine for your insecurities.

Lower self-confidence can motivate you to work harder and prepare more. If you are serious about your goals, you will have more incentive to work hard when you lack confidence in your

abilities. In fact, low confidence is only demotivating when you are not serious about your goals.

Most people like the idea of being exceptional but not enough to do what it takes to achieve it. Most people want to be slim, healthy, attractive, and successful, but few people are willing to do what it takes to achieve it—which suggests that they don't really want these things as much as they think. As the legendary Paul Arden (former executive creative director at Saatchi & Saatchi) noted: “*I want* means: [I]f I want it enough I will get it. Getting what you want means making the decisions you need to make to get what you want.” If you really want what you say you want, then your low confidence will only make you work harder to achieve it—because it will indicate a discrepancy between your desired goal and your current state.

Lower self-confidence reduces the chances of coming across as arrogant or being deluded. Although we live in a world that worships those who worship themselves—from Donald Trump to Lady Gaga to the latest reality TV “star”—the consequences of hubris are now beyond debate. According to Gallup, more than 60% of employees either dislike or hate their jobs, and the most common reason is that they have narcissistic bosses. If managers were less arrogant, fewer employees would be spending their working hours on Facebook, productivity rates would go up, and turnover rates would go down.

Lower self-confidence reduces the chances not only of coming across as arrogant but also of being deluded. Indeed, people with low self-confidence are more likely to admit their mistakes—instead of blaming others—and rarely take credit for others’ accomplishments. This is arguably the most important benefit of low self-confidence because it points to the fact that low self-confidence can bring success, not just to individuals but also to organizations and society.

In brief, if you are serious about your goals, low self-confidence can be your biggest ally in achieving them. It will motivate you to work hard, help you work on your limitations, and stop you from being a jerk, deluded, or both. It is therefore time debunk the myth: High self-confidence isn’t a blessing, and low self-confidence is not a curse—in fact, it is the other way around.

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Resilience

HBR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE SERIES

How Resilience Works

By Diane Coutu

When I began my career in journalism—I was a reporter at a national magazine in those days—there was a man I’ll call Claus Schmidt. He was in his mid-fifties, and to my impressionable eyes, he was the quintessential newsman: cynical at times, but unrelentingly curious and full of life, and often hilariously funny in a sandpaper-dry kind of way. He churned out hard-hitting cover stories and features with a speed and elegance I could only dream of. It always astounded me that he was never promoted to managing editor.

But people who knew Claus better than I did thought of him not just as a great newsman but as a quintessential survivor, someone who had endured in an environment often hostile to talent. He had lived through at least three major changes in the magazine’s leadership, losing most of his best friends and colleagues on the way. At home, two of

his children succumbed to incurable illnesses, and a third was killed in a traffic accident. Despite all this—or maybe because of it—he milled around the newsroom day after day, mentoring the cub reporters, talking about the novels he was writing—always looking forward to what the future held for him.

Why do some people suffer real hardships and not falter? Claus Schmidt could have reacted very differently. We've all seen that happen: One person cannot seem to get the confidence back after a layoff; another, persistently depressed, takes a few years off from life after her divorce. The question we would all like answered is, Why? What exactly is that quality of resilience that carries people through life?

It's a question that has fascinated me ever since I first learned of the Holocaust survivors in elementary school. In college, and later in my studies as an affiliate scholar at the Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute, I returned to the subject. For the past several months, however, I have looked on it with a new urgency, for it seems to me that the terrorism, war, and recession of recent months have made understanding resilience more important than ever. I have considered both the nature of individual resilience and what makes some organizations as a whole more resilient than others. Why do some people and some companies

buckle under pressure? And what makes others bend and ultimately bounce back?

My exploration has taught me much about resilience, although it's a subject none of us will ever understand fully. Indeed, resilience is one of the great puzzles of human nature, like creativity or the religious instinct. But in sifting through psychological research and in reflecting on the many stories of resilience I've heard, I have seen a little more deeply into the hearts and minds of people like Claus Schmidt and, in doing so, looked more deeply into the human psyche as well.

The buzz about resilience

Resilience is a hot topic in business these days. Not long ago, I was talking to a senior partner at a respected consulting firm about how to land the very best MBAs—the name of the game in that particular industry. The partner, Daniel Savageau (not his real name), ticked off a long list of qualities his firm sought in its hires: intelligence, ambition, integrity, analytic ability, and so on. “What about resilience?” I asked. “Well, that’s very popular right now,” he said. “It’s the new buzzword. Candidates even tell us they’re resilient; they volunteer the information. But frankly, they’re just too young to know that about

themselves. Resilience is something you realize you have *after* the fact.”

“But if you could, would you test for it?” I asked. “Does it matter in business?”

Savageau paused. He’s a man in his late forties and a success personally and professionally. Yet it hadn’t been a smooth ride to the top. He’d started his life as a poor French Canadian in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, and had lost his father at six. He lucked into a football scholarship but was kicked out of Boston University twice for drinking. He turned his life around in his twenties, married, divorced, remarried, and raised five children. Along the way, he made and lost two fortunes before helping to found the consulting firm he now runs. “Yes, it does matter,” he said at last. “In fact, it probably matters more than any of the usual things we look for.” In the course of reporting this article, I heard the same assertion time and again. As Dean Becker, the president and CEO of Adaptiv Learning Systems, a four-year-old company in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, that develops and delivers programs about resilience training, puts it: “More than education, more than experience, more than training, a person’s level of resilience will determine who succeeds and who fails. That’s true in the cancer ward, it’s true in the Olympics, and it’s true in the boardroom.”

Academic research into resilience started about 40 years ago with pioneering studies by Norman Garmezy, now a professor emeritus at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. After studying why many children of schizophrenic parents did not suffer psychological illness as a result of growing up with them, he concluded that a certain quality of resilience played a greater role in mental health than anyone had previously suspected.

Today, theories abound about what makes resilience. Looking at Holocaust victims, Maurice Vanderpol, a former president of the Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute, found that many of the healthy survivors of concentration camps had what he calls a “plastic shield.” The shield was comprised of several factors, including a sense of humor. Often the humor was black, but nonetheless it provided a critical sense of perspective. Other core characteristics that helped included the ability to form attachments to others and the possession of an inner psychological space that protected the survivors from the intrusions of abusive others. Research about other groups uncovered different qualities associated with resilience. The Search Institute, a Minneapolis-based nonprofit organization that focuses on resilience and youth, found that the more resilient kids have an uncanny ability to get adults to help them out. Still other research showed

that resilient inner-city youth often have talents such as athletic abilities that attract others to them.

Many of the early theories about resilience stressed the role of genetics. Some people are just born resilient, so the arguments went. There's some truth to that, of course, but an increasing body of empirical evidence shows that resilience—whether in children, survivors of concentration camps, or businesses back from the brink—can be learned. For example, George Vaillant, the director of the Study of Adult Development at Harvard Medical School in Boston, observes that within various groups studied during a 60-year period, some people became markedly more resilient over their lifetimes. Other psychologists claim that unresilient people more easily develop resiliency skills than those with head starts.

Most of the resilience theories I encountered in my research make good common sense. But I also observed that almost all the theories overlap in three ways. Resilient people, they posit, possess three characteristics: a staunch acceptance of reality; a deep belief, often buttressed by strongly held values, that life is meaningful; and an uncanny ability to improvise. You can bounce back from hardship with just one or two of these qualities, but you will only be truly resilient with all three. These three characteristics hold true for resilient organizations as well. Let's take a look at each of them in turn.

Facing down reality

A common belief about resilience is that it stems from an optimistic nature. That's true but only as long as such optimism doesn't distort your sense of reality. In extremely adverse situations, rose-colored thinking can actually spell disaster. This point was made poignantly to me by management researcher and writer Jim Collins, who happened upon this concept while researching *Good to Great*, his book on how companies transform themselves out of mediocrity. Collins had a hunch (an exactly wrong hunch) that resilient companies were filled with optimistic people. He tried out that idea on Admiral Jim Stockdale, who was held prisoner and tortured by the Vietcong for eight years.

Collins recalls: "I asked Stockdale: 'Who didn't make it out of the camps?' And he said, 'Oh, that's easy. It was the optimists. They were the ones who said we were going to be out by Christmas. And then they said we'd be out by Easter and then out by Fourth of July and out by Thanksgiving, and then it was Christmas again.' Then Stockdale turned to me and said, 'You know, I think they all died of broken hearts.'"

In the business world, Collins found the same unblinking attitude shared by executives at all the most successful companies he studied. Like Stockdale, resilient

people have very sober and down-to-earth views of those parts of reality that matter for survival. That's not to say that optimism doesn't have its place: In turning around a demoralized sales force, for instance, conjuring a sense of possibility can be a very powerful tool. But for bigger challenges, a cool, almost pessimistic, sense of reality is far more important.

Perhaps you're asking yourself, "Do I truly understand—and accept—the reality of my situation? Does my organization?" Those are good questions, particularly because research suggests most people slip into denial as a coping mechanism. Facing reality, really facing it, is grueling work. Indeed, it can be unpleasant and often emotionally wrenching. Consider the following story of organizational resilience, and see what it means to confront reality.

Prior to September 11, 2001, Morgan Stanley, the famous investment bank, was the largest tenant in the World Trade Center. The company had some 2,700 employees working in the south tower on 22 floors between the 43rd and the 74th. On that horrible day, the first plane hit the north tower at 8:46 a.m. and Morgan Stanley started evacuating just one minute later, at 8:47 a.m. When the second plane crashed into the south tower 15 minutes after that, Morgan Stanley's offices were largely empty. All

told, the company lost only seven employees despite receiving an almost direct hit.

Of course, the organization was just plain lucky to be in the second tower. Cantor Fitzgerald, whose offices were hit in the first attack, couldn't have done anything to save its employees. Still, it was Morgan Stanley's hard-nosed realism that enabled the company to benefit from its luck. Soon after the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center, senior management recognized that working in such a symbolic center of U.S. commercial power made the company vulnerable to attention from terrorists and possible attack.

With this grim realization, Morgan Stanley launched a program of preparedness at the micro level. Few companies take their fire drills seriously. Not so Morgan Stanley, whose VP of security for the Individual Investor Group, Rick Rescorla, brought a military discipline to the job. Rescorla, himself a highly resilient, decorated Vietnam vet, made sure that people were fully drilled about what to do in a catastrophe. When disaster struck on September 11, Rescorla was on a bullhorn telling Morgan Stanley employees to stay calm and follow their well-practiced drill, even though some building supervisors were telling occupants that all was well. Sadly, Rescorla himself, whose life story has been widely covered in recent months, was one of the seven who didn't make it out.

“When you’re in financial services where so much depends on technology, contingency planning is a major part of your business,” says President and COO Robert G. Scott. But Morgan Stanley was prepared for the very toughest reality. It had not just one but three recovery sites where employees could congregate and business could take place if work locales were ever disrupted. “Multiple backup sites seemed like an incredible extravagance on September 10,” concedes Scott. “But on September 12, they seemed like genius.”

Maybe it was genius; it was undoubtedly resilience at work. The fact is, when we truly stare down reality, we prepare ourselves to act in ways that allow us to endure and survive extraordinary hardship. We train ourselves how to survive before the fact.

The search for meaning

The ability to see reality is closely linked to the second building block of resilience, the propensity to make meaning of terrible times. We all know people who, under duress, throw up their hands and cry, “How can this be happening to me?” Such people see themselves as victims, and living through hardship carries no lessons for them. But resilient people devise constructs about their suffering to create some sort of meaning for themselves and others.

I have a friend I'll call Jackie Oiseaux who suffered repeated psychoses over a 10-year period due to an undiagnosed bipolar disorder. Today, she holds down a big job in one of the top publishing companies in the country, has a family, and is a prominent member of her church community. When people ask her how she bounced back from her crises, she runs her hands through her hair. "People sometimes say, 'Why me?' But I've always said, 'Why *not* me?' True, I lost many things during my illness," she says, "but I found many more—incredible friends who saw me through the bleakest times and who will give meaning to my life forever."

This dynamic of meaning making is, most researchers agree, the way resilient people build bridges from present-day hardships to a fuller, better-constructed future. Those bridges make the present manageable, for lack of a better word, removing the sense that the present is overwhelming. This concept was beautifully articulated by Viktor E. Frankl, an Austrian psychiatrist and an Auschwitz survivor. In the midst of staggering suffering, Frankl invented "meaning therapy," a humanistic therapy technique that helps individuals make the kinds of decisions that will create significance in their lives.

In his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl described the pivotal moment in the camp when he developed meaning therapy. He was on his way to work one

day, worrying whether he should trade his last cigarette for a bowl of soup. He wondered how he was going to work with a new foreman whom he knew to be particularly sadistic. Suddenly, he was disgusted by just how trivial and meaningless his life had become. He realized that to survive, he had to find some purpose. Frankl did so by imagining himself giving a lecture after the war on the psychology of the concentration camp, to help outsiders understand what he had been through. Although he wasn't even sure he would survive, Frankl created some concrete goals for himself. In doing so, he succeeded in rising above the sufferings of the moment. As he put it in his book: "We must never forget that we may also find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation, when facing a fate that cannot be changed."

Frankl's theory underlies most resilience coaching in business. Indeed, I was struck by how often businesspeople referred to his work. "Resilience training—what we call hardiness—is a way for us to help people construct meaning in their everyday lives," explains Salvatore R. Maddi, a University of California, Irvine psychology professor and the director of the Hardiness Institute in Newport Beach, California. "When people realize the power of resilience training, they often say, 'Doc, is this what psychotherapy is?' But psychotherapy is for people whose lives have fallen apart badly and need repair. We see our

work as showing people life skills and attitudes. Maybe those things should be taught at home, maybe they should be taught in schools, but they're not. So we end up doing it in business."

Yet the challenge confronting resilience trainers is often more difficult than we might imagine. Meaning can be elusive, and just because you found it once doesn't mean you'll keep it or find it again. Consider Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who survived the war against the Nazis, imprisonment in the gulag, and cancer. Yet when he moved to a farm in peaceful, safe Vermont, he could not cope with the "infantile West." He was unable to discern any real meaning in what he felt to be the destructive and irresponsible freedom of the West. Upset by his critics, he withdrew into his farmhouse, behind a locked fence, seldom to be seen in public. In 1994, a bitter man, Solzhenitsyn moved back to Russia.

Since finding meaning in one's environment is such an important aspect of resilience, it should come as no surprise that the most successful organizations and people possess strong value systems. Strong values infuse an environment with meaning because they offer ways to interpret and shape events. While it's popular these days to ridicule values, it's surely no coincidence that the most resilient organization in the world has been the Catholic Church, which has survived wars, corruption, and schism

for more than 2,000 years, thanks largely to its immutable set of values. Businesses that survive also have their creeds, which give them purposes beyond just making money. Strikingly, many companies describe their value systems in religious terms. Pharmaceutical giant Johnson & Johnson, for instance, calls its value system, set out in a document given to every new employee at orientation, the Credo. Parcel company UPS talks constantly about its Noble Purpose.

Value systems at resilient companies change very little over the years and are used as scaffolding in times of trouble. UPS Chairman and CEO Mike Eskew believes that the Noble Purpose helped the company to rally after the agonizing strike in 1997. Says Eskew: "It was a hugely difficult time, like a family feud. Everyone had close friends on both sides of the fence, and it was tough for us to pick sides. But what saved us was our Noble Purpose. Whatever side people were on, they all shared a common set of values. Those values are core to us and never change; they frame most of our important decisions. Our strategy and our mission may change, but our values never do."

The religious connotations of words like "credo," "values," and "noble purpose," however, should not be confused with the actual content of the values. Companies can hold ethically questionable values and still be very resilient. Consider Phillip Morris, which has demonstrated

impressive resilience in the face of increasing unpopularity. As Jim Collins points out, Phillip Morris has very strong values, although we might not agree with them—for instance, the value of “adult choice.” But there’s no doubt that Phillip Morris executives believe strongly in its values, and the strength of their beliefs sets the company apart from most of the other tobacco companies. In this context, it is worth noting that resilience is neither ethically good nor bad. It is merely the skill and the capacity to be robust under conditions of enormous stress and change. As Viktor Frankl wrote: “On the average, only those prisoners could keep alive who, after years of trekking from camp to camp, had lost all scruples in their fight for existence; they were prepared to use every means, honest and otherwise, even brutal . . . in order to save themselves. We who have come back . . . we know: The best of us did not return.”

Values, positive or negative, are actually more important for organizational resilience than having resilient people on the payroll. If resilient employees are all interpreting reality in different ways, their decisions and actions may well conflict, calling into doubt the survival of their organization. And as the weakness of an organization becomes apparent, highly resilient individuals are more likely to jettison the organization than to imperil their own survival.

Ritualized ingenuity

The third building block of resilience is the ability to make do with whatever is at hand. Psychologists follow the lead of French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss in calling this skill *bricolage*.¹ Intriguingly, the roots of that word are closely tied to the concept of resilience, which literally means “bouncing back.” Says Levi-Strauss: “In its old sense, the verb *bricoler* . . . was always used with reference to some extraneous movement: a ball rebounding, a dog straying, or a horse swerving from its direct course to avoid an obstacle.”

Bricolage in the modern sense can be defined as a kind of inventiveness, an ability to improvise a solution to a problem without proper or obvious tools or materials. Bricoleurs are always tinkering—building radios from household effects or fixing their own cars. They make the most of what they have, putting objects to unfamiliar uses. In the concentration camps, for example, resilient inmates knew to pocket pieces of string or wire whenever they found them. The string or wire might later become useful—to fix a pair of shoes, perhaps, which in freezing conditions might make the difference between life and death.

When situations unravel, bricoleurs muddle through, imagining possibilities where others are confounded. I have two friends, whom I’ll call Paul Shields and Mike Andrews,

who were roommates throughout their college years. To no one's surprise, when they graduated, they set up a business together selling educational materials to schools, businesses, and consulting firms. At first, the company was a great success, making both founders paper millionaires. But the recession of the early 1990s hit the company hard, and many core clients fell away. At the same time, Paul experienced a bitter divorce and a depression that made it impossible for him to work. Mike offered to buy Paul out but was instead slapped with a lawsuit claiming that Mike was trying to steal the business. At this point, a less resilient person might have just walked away from the mess. Not Mike. As the case wound through the courts, he kept the company going any way he could—constantly morphing the business until he found a model that worked: going into joint ventures to sell English-language training materials to Russian and Chinese companies. Later, he branched off into publishing newsletters for clients. At one point, he was even writing video scripts for his competitors. Thanks to all this bricolage, by the time the lawsuit was settled in his favor, Mike had an entirely different, and much more solid, business than the one he had started with.

Bricolage can be practiced on a higher level as well. Richard Feynman, winner of the 1965 Nobel Prize in physics, exemplified what I like to think of as intellectual

bricolage. Out of pure curiosity, Feynman made himself an expert on cracking safes, not only looking at the mechanics of safecracking but also cobbling together psychological insights about people who used safes and set the locks. He cracked many of the safes at Los Alamos, for instance, because he guessed that theoretical physicists would not set the locks with random code numbers they might forget but would instead use a sequence with mathematical significance. It turned out that the three safes containing all the secrets to the atomic bomb were set to the same mathematical constant, e , whose first six digits are 2.71828.

Resilient organizations are stuffed with bricoleurs, though not all of them, of course, are Richard Feynmans. Indeed, companies that survive regard improvisation as a core skill. Consider UPS, which empowers its drivers to do whatever it takes to deliver packages on time. Says CEO Eskew: "We tell our employees to get the job done. If that means they need to improvise, they improvise. Otherwise we just couldn't do what we do every day. Just think what can go wrong: a busted traffic light, a flat tire, a bridge washed out. If a snowstorm hits Louisville tonight, a group of people will sit together and discuss how to handle the problem. Nobody tells them to do that. They come together because it's our tradition to do so."

That tradition meant that the company was delivering parcels in southeast Florida just one day after Hurricane Andrew devastated the region in 1992, causing billions of dollars in damage. Many people were living in their cars because their homes had been destroyed, yet UPS drivers and managers sorted packages at a diversion site and made deliveries even to those who were stranded in their cars. It was largely UPS's improvisational skills that enabled it to keep functioning after the catastrophic hit. And the fact that the company continued on gave others a sense of purpose or meaning amid the chaos.

Improvisation of the sort practiced by UPS, however, is a far cry from unbridled creativity. Indeed, much like the military, UPS lives on rules and regulations. As Eskew says: "Drivers always put their keys in the same place. They close the doors the same way. They wear their uniforms the same way. We are a company of precision." He believes that although they may seem stifling, UPS's rules were what allowed the company to bounce back immediately after Hurricane Andrew, for they enabled people to focus on the one or two fixes they needed to make in order to keep going.

Eskew's opinion is echoed by Karl E. Weick, a professor of organizational behavior at the University of Michigan Business School in Ann Arbor and one of the most respected thinkers on organizational psychology. "There is

good evidence that when people are put under pressure, they regress to their most habituated ways of responding,” Weick has written. “What we do not expect under life-threatening pressure is creativity.” In other words, the rules and regulations that make some companies appear less creative may actually make them more resilient in times of real turbulence.

Claus Schmidt, the newsman I mentioned earlier, died about five years ago, but I’m not sure I could have interviewed him about his own resilience even if he were alive. It would have felt strange, I think, to ask him, “Claus, did you really face down reality? Did you make meaning out of your hardships? Did you improvise your recovery after each professional and personal disaster?” He may not have been able to answer. In my experience, resilient people don’t often describe themselves that way. They shrug off their survival stories and very often assign them to luck.

Obviously, luck does have a lot to do with surviving. It was luck that Morgan Stanley was situated in the south tower and could put its preparedness training to work. But being lucky is not the same as being resilient. Resilience is a reflex—a way of facing and understanding the world—that is deeply etched into a person’s mind and soul. Resilient people and companies face reality with

staunchness, make meaning of hardship instead of crying out in despair, and improvise solutions from thin air. Others do not. This is the nature of resilience, and we will never completely understand it.

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Note

1. See, e.g., Karl E. Weick, "The Collapse of Sense-making in Organizations: The Mann Gulch Disaster," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, December 1993.

Reprinted from *Harvard Business Review*, May 2002
(product #R0205B).

Resilience for the Rest of Us

By Daniel Goleman

There are two ways to become more resilient: one by talking to yourself, the other by retraining your brain. If you've suffered a major failure, take the sage advice given by psychologist Martin Seligman in the HBR article "Building Resilience" (April 2011). Talk to yourself. Give yourself a cognitive intervention, and counter defeatist thinking with an optimistic attitude. Challenge your downbeat thinking, and replace it with a positive outlook.

Fortunately, major failures come along rarely in life.

But what about bouncing back from the more frequent annoying screwups, minor setbacks, and irritating upsets that are routine in any leader's life? Resilience is, again, the answer—but with a different flavor. You need to retrain your brain.

The brain has a very different mechanism for bouncing back from the cumulative toll of daily hassles. And with a

little effort, you can upgrade its ability to snap back from life's downers.

Whenever we get so upset that we say or do something we later regret (and who doesn't now and then?), that's a sure sign that our amygdala—the brain's radar for danger and the trigger for the fight-or-flight response—has hijacked the brain's executive centers in the prefrontal cortex. The neural key to resilience lies in how quickly we recover from that hijacked state.

The circuitry that brings us back to full energy and focus after an amygdala hijack concentrates in the left side of our prefrontal area, says Richard Davidson, a neuroscientist at the University of Wisconsin. He's also found that when we're distressed, there's heightened activity on the right side of the prefrontal area. Each of us has a characteristic level of left/right activity that predicts our daily mood range—if we're tilted to the right, more upsets; if to the left, we're quicker to recover from distress of all kinds.

To tackle this in the workplace, Davidson teamed with the CEO of a high-pressure, 24/7, biotech startup and meditation expert Jon Kabat-Zinn of the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Kabat-Zinn offered the employees at the biotech outfit instruction in mindfulness, an attention-training method that teaches the brain to

register anything happening in the present moment with full focus—but without reacting.

The instructions are simple:

1. Find a quiet, private place where you can be undistracted for a few minutes. For instance, close your office door and mute your phone.
2. Sit comfortably, with your back straight but relaxed.
3. Focus your awareness on your breath, staying attentive to the sensations of the inhalation and exhalation, and start again on the next breath.
4. Do not judge your breathing or try to change it in any way.
5. See anything else that comes to mind as a distraction—thoughts, sounds, whatever. Let them go and return your attention to your breath.

After eight weeks and an average of 30 minutes a day practicing mindfulness, the employees had shifted their ratio from tilted toward the stressed-out right side to leaning toward the resilient left side. What's more, they said they remembered what they loved about their work: They got in touch with what had brought them energy in the first place.

To get the full benefit of mindfulness, a daily practice of 20 to 30 minutes works best. Think of it like a mental exercise routine. It can be very helpful to have guided instructions, but the key is to find a slot for the practice in your daily routine. (There are even instructions for using a long drive as your practice session.)

Mindfulness has steadily been gaining credence among hard-nosed executives. There are centers where mindfulness instruction has been tailored to businesspeople, from tony resorts like Miraval Resort in Arizona to programs in mindful leadership at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Google University has been offering a course in mindfulness to employees for years.

Might you benefit from tuning up your brain's resilience circuitry by learning to practice mindfulness? Among high-performing executives, the effects of stress can be subtle. My colleagues Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee suggest as a rough diagnostic of leadership stress asking yourself, "Do I have a vague sense of unease, restlessness, or the feeling that life is not great (a higher standard than 'good enough')?" A bit of mindfulness might put your mind at ease.

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How to Evaluate, Manage, and Strengthen Your Resilience

By David Kopans

Think back to your last off-site meeting. You and the rest of your team likely poured over reports and spreadsheets, facts and figures. Strewn about the table were probably the tools of your trade: reams of data, balance sheets, and P&Ls. Managers understand that clear-eyed analysis—both quantitative and qualitative—is the key to building a resilient business. And yet when it comes to measuring and strengthening our own ability to adapt, grow, and prosper, rarely do we apply the same methodical approach.

But we should. Based on my own experience starting, building, and growing companies, as well as upon decades of research showing the underlying components of personal resilience, I've discovered a few fundamental things you can do to actually evaluate, manage, and strengthen your

own resilience in the same way that you would increase the resiliency of your company:

Build up your positivity currency. We can't just print resilience the way countries print money. Individuals must use what I call a "positivity currency" approach that is grounded in actual positive interactions, events, and memories—factors that are known to boost resilience. This currency is only "printed" and stored as assets when we focus on positive things and express gratitude for them. Why? Because maintaining a positive outlook and regularly expressing gratitude are the bullion bars that have real value in backstopping and building resilience.

Research by Robert Emmons of UC Davis, Michael McCullough of the University of Miami, and others clearly shows that they are among the most reliable methods for increasing personal happiness and life satisfaction.¹ Creating such positivity currency can decrease anxiety, reduce symptoms of illness, and improve the quality of your sleep. All of which, of course, lead to greater personal resilience.

Keep records. None of the tools we use to evaluate companies work very well without good record keeping. That's also true when it comes to building individual resilience. When you commit positive interactions, events, and memories to

the written word, they register higher value than other non-written forms of positivity currency-based activity, according to research by positive psychology expert Martin Seligman of the University of Pennsylvania.² Record your positive currency transactions (by jotting them down in a leather bound journal or a digital equivalent). The data points you record could be as simple as keeping a written tally by category (such as family, friends, or work) in a paper notebook, entering the information into a spreadsheet, or assigning hashtags to items in a digital gratitude journal.

Create a bull market. Financial markets boom when increasing numbers of investors want in. Likewise, our own resilience grows when we encourage positivity buyers to enter the market. It's not a difficult task; positivity is socially contagious. In the research behind their book *Connected: The Surprising Power of Our Social Networks and How They Shape Our Lives*, Harvard's Nicholas Christakis and the University of California, San Diego's James Fowler detail how happiness depends not just on our own choices and actions, but also on those of people who are two or even three degrees removed from us. What this means is by being more positive ourselves, we encourage others to do the same, and this in turn creates a virtuous "reverse run

on the bank” positive feedback loop, and our own resilience is increased and strengthened by the actions of others.

Take a portfolio approach. Resilient businesses diversify risk. Accordingly, resilient individuals diversify their positivity currency. They look to increase their overall resilience by evaluating what it is that provides the highest returns across their entire “life portfolio” and then investing more in those areas. Most frequently, these high-return assets come from our lives outside of the office. Indeed, while we may spend the majority of waking hours at work, our job should not be central to our overall positive outlook. In a 2015 report entitled “The Happiness Study” from Blackhawk Engagement Solutions, respondents ranked their jobs eighth out of a list of 12 contributors to overall happiness. Ranking in the top spots were family, friends, health, hobbies, and community.³ It follows that by generating more positivity currency in those areas, you will increase the ability to bring your best self to work.

Report regularly. Finally, just as regular review of a company’s financials is important to building a resilient business, building individual resilience requires regular review of positivity currency data. This review not only enables you to glean insights and take corrective actions, but also to boost your resilience by simply increasing your exposure to

positive interactions and expressions of gratitude. As suggested in a famous 2014 experiment conducted by Facebook's data scientists and published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, if your news feed skews positive, so will you.⁴

Even if you don't analyze your positivity currency data deeply like a Wall Street quant, just exposing yourself to it on a regular basis will make you more resilient. So find a regular time to celebrate and reflect on your positivity currency (I do it while I wait for my morning coffee). Make it a habit, and your level of resilience—and that of your friends, family, and coworkers—will rise.

DAVID KOPANS is the founder and CEO of PF Loop, a company that aims to make positive change in the world through software applications and digital services grounded in positive psychology research.

Notes

1. R. Emmons, "Why Gratitude Is Good," *Greater Good*, November 16, 2010, http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why_gratitude_is_good; and "Why Practice Gratitude," *Greater Good*, October 31, 2016,

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3. "The Happiness Study: An Employee Rewards and Recognition Study," Blackhawk Engagement Solutions, June 2, 2105, www.bhengagement.com/report/employee-happiness-study/.
4. A. D. I. Kramer et al., "Experimental Evidence of Massive-Scale Emotional Contagion Through Social Networks," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 111, no. 24 (2014): 8788–8790.

Adapted from content posted on hbr.org on June 14, 2016
(product # H02XDP).

Find the Coaching in Criticism

By Sheila Heen and Douglas Stone

Feedback is crucial. That's obvious: It improves performance, develops talent, aligns expectations, solves problems, guides promotion and pay, and boosts the bottom line.

But it's equally obvious that in many organizations, feedback doesn't work. A glance at the stats tells the story: Only 36% of managers complete appraisals thoroughly and on time. In one recent survey, 55% of employees said their most recent performance review had been unfair or inaccurate, and one in four said they dread such evaluations more than anything else in their working lives. When senior HR executives were asked about their biggest performance management challenge, 63% cited managers' inability or unwillingness to have difficult feedback discussions. Coaching and mentoring? Uneven at best.

Most companies try to address these problems by training leaders to give feedback more effectively and more often. That's fine as far as it goes; everyone benefits when managers are better communicators. But improving the skills of the feedback giver won't accomplish much if the receiver isn't able to absorb what is said. It is the receiver who controls whether feedback is let in or kept out, who has to make sense of what he or she is hearing, and who decides whether or not to change. People need to stop treating feedback only as something that must be pushed and instead improve their ability to pull.

For the past 20 years we've coached executives on difficult conversations, and we've found that almost everyone, from new hires to C-suite veterans, struggles with receiving feedback. A critical performance review, a well-intended suggestion, or an oblique comment that may or may not even be feedback ("Well, your presentation was certainly interesting") can spark an emotional reaction, inject tension into the relationship, and bring communication to a halt. But there's good news, too: The skills needed to receive feedback well are distinct and learnable. They include being able to identify and manage the emotions triggered by the feedback and extract value from criticism even when it's poorly delivered.

Why feedback doesn't register

What makes receiving feedback so hard? The process strikes at the tension between two core human needs—the need to learn and grow, and the need to be accepted just the way you are. As a result, even a seemingly benign suggestion can leave you feeling angry, anxious, badly treated, or profoundly threatened. A hedge such as “Don’t take this personally” does nothing to soften the blow.

Getting better at receiving feedback starts with understanding and managing those feelings. You might think there are a thousand ways in which feedback can push your buttons, but in fact there are only three.

Truth triggers are set off by the content of the feedback. When assessments or advice seem off base, unhelpful, or simply untrue, you feel indignant, wronged, and exasperated.

Relationship triggers are tripped by the person providing the feedback. Exchanges are often colored by what you believe about the giver (He’s got no credibility on this topic!) and how you feel about your previous interactions (After all I’ve done for you, I get this petty criticism?). So you might reject coaching that you would accept on its merits if it came from someone else.

Identity triggers are all about your relationship with yourself. Whether the feedback is right or wrong, wise or witless, it can be devastating if it causes your sense of who

you are to come undone. In such moments you'll struggle with feeling overwhelmed, defensive, or off balance.

All these responses are natural and reasonable; in some cases they are unavoidable. The solution isn't to pretend you don't have them. It's to recognize what's happening and learn how to derive benefit from feedback even when it sets off one or more of your triggers.

Six steps to becoming a better receiver

Taking feedback well is a process of sorting and filtering. You need to understand the other person's point of view, try on ideas that may at first seem a poor fit, and experiment with different ways of doing things. You also need to discard or shelve critiques that are genuinely misdirected or are not helpful right away. But it's nearly impossible to do any of those things from inside a triggered response. Instead of ushering you into a nuanced conversation that will help you learn, your triggers prime you to reject, counterattack, or withdraw.

The six steps below will keep you from throwing valuable feedback onto the discard pile or—just as damaging—accepting and acting on comments that you would be better off disregarding. They are presented as advice to the receiver. But, of course, understanding the

challenges of receiving feedback helps the giver be more effective, too.

1. Know your tendencies

You've been getting feedback all your life, so there are no doubt patterns in how you respond. Do you defend yourself on the facts ("This is plain wrong"), argue about the method of delivery ("You're really doing this by email?"), or strike back ("You, of all people?")? Do you smile on the outside but seethe on the inside? Do you get teary or filled with righteous indignation? And what role does the passage of time play? Do you tend to reject feedback in the moment and then step back and consider it over time? Do you accept it all immediately but later decide it's not valid? Do you agree with it intellectually but have trouble changing your behavior?

When Michael, an advertising executive, hears his boss make an offhand joke about his lack of professionalism, it hits him like a sledgehammer. "I'm flooded with shame," he told us, "and all my failings rush to mind, as if I'm Googling 'things wrong with me' and getting 1.2 million hits, with sponsored ads from my father and my ex. In this state it's hard to see the feedback at 'actual size.'" But now that Michael understands his standard operating procedure, he's able to make better choices about where to go from there: "I can reassure myself that I'm exaggerating, and

usually after I sleep on it, I'm in a better place to figure out whether there's something I can learn."

2. Disentangle the "what" from the "who"

If the feedback is on target and the advice is wise, it shouldn't matter who delivers it. But it does. When a relationship trigger is activated, entwining the content of comments with your feelings about the giver (or about how, when, or where she delivered the comments), learning is short-circuited. To keep that from happening, you have to work to separate the message from the messenger, and then consider both.

Janet, a chemist and a team leader at a pharmaceutical company, received glowing comments from her peers and superiors during her 360-degree review but was surprised by the negative feedback she got from her direct reports. She immediately concluded that the problem was theirs: "I have high standards, and some of them can't handle that," she remembers thinking. "They aren't used to someone holding their feet to the fire." In this way, she changed the subject from her management style to her subordinates' competence, preventing her from learning something important about the impact she had on others.

Eventually the penny dropped, Janet says. "I came to see that whether it was their performance problem or my leadership problem, those were not mutually exclusive

issues, and both were worth solving.” She was able to disentangle the issues and talk to her team about both. Wisely, she began the conversation with their feedback to her, asking, “What am I doing that’s making things tough? What would improve the situation?”

3. Sort toward coaching

Some feedback is evaluative (“Your rating is a 4”); some is coaching (“Here’s how you can improve”). Everyone needs both. Evaluations tell you where you stand, what to expect, and what is expected of you. Coaching allows you to learn and improve and helps you play at a higher level.

It’s not always easy to distinguish one from the other. When a board member phoned James to suggest that he start the next quarter’s CFO presentation with analyst predictions rather than internal projections, was that intended as a helpful suggestion, or was it a veiled criticism of his usual approach? When in doubt, people tend to assume the worst and to put even well-intentioned coaching into the evaluation bin. Feeling judged is likely to set off your identity triggers, and the resulting anxiety can drown out the opportunity to learn. So whenever possible, sort toward coaching. Work to hear feedback as potentially valuable advice from a fresh perspective rather than as an indictment of how you’ve done things in the past. When James took that approach, “the suggestion became less

emotionally loaded,” he says. “I decided to hear it as simply an indication of how that board member might more easily digest quarterly information.”

4. Unpack the feedback

Often it’s not immediately clear whether feedback is valid and useful. So before you accept or reject it, do some analysis to better understand it.

Here’s a hypothetical example. Kara, who’s in sales, is told by Johann, an experienced colleague, that she needs to “be more assertive.” Her reaction might be to reject his advice (“I think I’m pretty assertive already”). Or she might acquiesce (“I really do need to step it up”). But before she decides what to do, she needs to understand what he really means. Does he think she should speak up more often, or just with greater conviction? Should she smile more or less? Have the confidence to admit she doesn’t know something or the confidence to pretend she does?

Even the simple advice to “be more assertive” comes from a complex set of observations and judgments that Johann has made while watching Kara in meetings and with customers. Kara needs to dig into the general suggestion and find out what in particular prompted it. What did Johann see her do or fail to do? What did he expect, and what is he worried about? In other words, where is the feedback coming from?

Kara also needs to know where the feedback is going—exactly what Johann wants her to do differently and why. After a clarifying discussion, she might agree that she is less assertive than others on the sales floor but disagree with the idea that she should change. If all her sales heroes are quiet, humble, and deeply curious about customers' needs, Kara's view of what it means to be good at sales might look and sound very different from Johann's *Glengarry Glen Ross* ideal.

When you set aside snap judgments and take time to explore where feedback is coming from and where it's going, you can enter into a rich, informative conversation about perceived best practices—whether you decide to take the advice or not.

5. Ask for just one thing

Feedback is less likely to set off your emotional triggers if you request it and direct it. So don't wait until your annual performance review. Find opportunities to get bite-size pieces of coaching from a variety of people throughout the year. Don't invite criticism with a big, unfocused question like "Do you have any feedback for me?" Make the process more manageable by asking a colleague, a boss, or a direct report, "What's one thing you see me doing (or failing to do) that holds me back?" That person may name the first behavior that comes to mind or the most important one on

his or her list. Either way, you'll get concrete information and can tease out more specifics at your own pace.

Roberto, a fund manager at a financial services firm, found his 360-degree review process overwhelming and confusing. "Eighteen pages of charts and graphs and no ability to have follow-up conversations to clarify the feedback was frustrating," he says, adding that it also left him feeling awkward around his colleagues.

Now Roberto taps two or three people each quarter to ask for one thing he might work on. "They don't offer the same things, but over time I hear themes, and that gives me a good sense of where my growth edge lies," he says. "And I have really good conversations—with my boss, with my team, even with peers where there's some friction in the relationship. They're happy to tell me one thing to change, and often they're right. It does help us work more smoothly together."

Research has shown that those who explicitly seek critical feedback (that is, who are not just fishing for praise) tend to get higher performance ratings. Why? Mainly, we think, because someone who's asking for coaching is more likely to take what is said to heart and genuinely improve. But also because when you ask for feedback, you not only find out how others see you, you also *influence* how they see you. Soliciting constructive

criticism communicates humility, respect, passion for excellence, and confidence, all in one go.

6. Engage in small experiments

After you've worked to solicit and understand feedback, it may still be hard to discern which bits of advice will help you and which ones won't. We suggest designing small experiments to find out. Even though you may doubt that a suggestion will be useful, if the downside risk is small and the upside potential is large, it's worth a try. James, the CFO we discussed earlier, decided to take the board member's advice for the next presentation and see what happened. Some directors were pleased with the change, but the shift in format prompted others to offer suggestions of their own. Today James reverse-engineers his presentations to meet board members' current top-of-mind concerns. He sends out an email a week beforehand asking for any burning questions and either front-loads his talk with answers to them or signals at the start that he will get to them later on. "It's a little more challenging to prepare for but actually much easier to give," he says. "I spend less time fielding unexpected questions, which was the hardest part of the job."

That's an example worth following. When someone gives you advice, test it out. If it works, great. If it doesn't, you can try again, tweak your approach, or decide to end

the experiment. Criticism is never easy to take. Even when you know that it's essential to your development and you trust that the person delivering it wants you to succeed, it can activate psychological triggers. You might feel misjudged, ill-used, and sometimes threatened to your very core.

Your growth depends on your ability to pull value from criticism in spite of your natural responses and on your willingness to seek out even more advice and coaching from bosses, peers, and subordinates. They may be good or bad at providing it, or they may have little time for it—but you are the most important factor in your own development. If you're determined to learn from whatever feedback you get, no one can stop you.

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Firing Back

How Great Leaders Rebound After Career Disasters

By Jeffrey A. Sonnenfeld and Andrew J. Ward

Among the tests of a leader, few are more challenging—and more painful—than recovering from a career catastrophe, whether it is caused by natural disaster, illness, misconduct, slip ups, or unjust conspiratorial overthrow. But real leaders don't cave in. Defeat energizes them to rejoin the fray with greater determination and vigor.

Take the case of Jamie Dimon, who was fired as president of Citigroup but now is CEO of JP Morgan Chase. Or look at Vanguard founder Jack Bogle, who was removed from his position as president of Wellington Management but then went on to create the index fund and become a leading voice for governance reform. Similarly, there's former Coca-Cola president Steve Heyer, who was

surprisingly passed over for the CEO position at Coke but then was quickly named head of Starwood Hotels. Most colorful, perhaps, is Donald Trump, who recovered from two rounds of financial distress in his casino business and is admired today both as a hugely successful estate developer and as a producer and star of popular reality TV shows—and of course ran successfully for President of the United States.

These stories are still the exception rather than the rule. F. Scott Fitzgerald's famous observation that there are no second acts in American lives casts an especially dark shadow over the derailed careers of business leaders. In our research—analyzing more than 450 CEO successions between 1988 and 1992 at large, publicly traded companies—we found that only 35% of ousted CEOs returned to an active executive role within two years of departure; 22% stepped back and took only advisory roles, generally counseling smaller organizations or sitting on boards. But 43% effectively ended their careers and went into retirement.

What prevents a deposed leader from coming back? Leaders who cannot recover have a tendency to blame themselves and are often tempted to dwell on the past rather than look to the future. They secretly hold themselves responsible for their career setback, whether they were or not, and get caught in a psychological web of

their own making, unable to move beyond the position they no longer hold. This dynamic is usually reinforced by well-meaning colleagues and even by family and friends, who may try to lay blame in an attempt to make sense of the chaos surrounding the disaster. Sadly, their advice can often be more damaging than helpful.

In every culture, the ability to transcend life's adversity is an essential feature of becoming a great leader. In his influential 1949 book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, anthropologist Joseph Campbell showed us that the various stories of great leaders around the world, in every culture and every era, are all essentially the same story—the “hero myth.” This myth is embodied in the life stages of such universal archetypes as Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, Buddha, Aeneas, Odysseus, and the Aztecs' Tezcatlipoca. Transformational leaders follow a path that entails a call to greatness, early successes (involving tough choices), ongoing trials, profound setbacks, and, ultimately, triumph as they reintegrate into society. If Campbell were writing today, he might want to include business leaders in his study, as they must confront similar trials on their way to greatness.

This article is intended to help leaders—or anyone suffering from an unexpected setback—examine their often abrupt fall from grace and to give them a process through which they can recover, and even exceed their past

accomplishments. From our 22 years of interviews with 300 fired CEOs and other derailed professionals, our scholarly study of leadership, our consulting assignments, and our own searing personal experiences, we are convinced that leaders can triumph over tragedy, provided they take conscious steps to do so. For a start, they must carefully *decide how to fight back*. Once this crucial decision has been taken, they must *recruit others into battle*. They must then *take steps to recover their heroic status*, in the process proving to themselves and others that they have the *mettle* necessary to *rediscover their heroic mission*.

Few people exemplify this journey better than President Jimmy Carter. After his devastating 1980 reelection loss to Ronald Reagan, Carter was emotionally fatigued. As he told us sometime later, “I returned to Plains, Georgia, completely exhausted, slept for almost 24 hours, and then awoke to an altogether new, unwanted, and potentially empty life.” While proud of his achievements—his success in deregulating energy, for example, his efforts to promote global human rights, and his ability to broker peace between Israel and Egypt through the Camp David Accords—post election, Carter needed to move past his sense of frustration and rejection, particularly his failure to secure the timely release of the American hostages in Iran.

Despite his pain and humiliation, Carter did not retreat into anger or self-pity. He realized that his global prominence gave him a forum to fight to restore his influential role in world events. Accordingly, he recruited others into battle by enlisting the enthusiastic support of his wife, Rosalynn, several members of his administration, academic researchers in the sciences and social sciences, world leaders, and financial backers to build the Carter Center. He proved his mettle by refusing to remove himself from the fray. Indeed, he continued to involve himself in international conflict mediation in Ethiopia and Eritrea, Liberia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Venezuela, demonstrating in the process that he was not a has-been. He regained his heroic stature when he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002 “for his decades of untiring effort to find peaceful solutions to international conflicts, to advance democracy and human rights, and to promote economic and social development.” And he has rediscovered his heroic mission by using the Carter Center to continue his drive to advance human rights and alleviate needless suffering.

Let us look now at how some great business leaders have followed the same path to recover from their own disastrous career setbacks.

Decide how to fight back

The first decision you will face in responding to a career disaster is the question of whether to confront the situation that brought you down—with an exhausting, expensive, and perhaps embarrassing battle—or to try to put it behind you as quickly as possible, in the hope that no one will notice or remember for long. In some cases, it's best to avoid direct and immediate confrontation. Home Depot cofounder Bernie Marcus, for example, decided to sidestep the quicksand of litigation against Sandy Sigoloff, the conglomerateur who fired Marcus from Handy Dan Home Improvement. Marcus made his battleground the marketplace rather than the courtroom. Thanks to this strategy, he was free to set the historic course for the Home Depot, which now under his successor is approaching \$100 billion in sales, with several hundred thousand employees.

Other comeback kids also began with a graceful retreat. Jamie Dimon was sacked as president of Citigroup by then chairman Sandy Weill following 16 years of partnership in building the institution. When he spoke to us and to others, he did not dwell on his disappointment or sense of injustice. Monica Langley in her 2003 book *Tearing Down the Walls* describes what happened when Weill asked Dimon to resign. Dimon was shocked but replied, "You've obviously thought this through, and there's nothing I can do." As he scanned the already-prepared

press release, Dimon saw that the board agreed with Weill. The firm offered Dimon a generous, nonrestrictive severance package, so a battle with Weill seemed pointless. While he was unemployed, Dimon read biographies of great national leaders who had truly suffered. He also took up boxing—another way, perhaps, of dealing with the stress and pain. After a year of this, Dimon decided he needed closure, so he invited Weill to lunch at the Four Seasons to thank him. As Dimon recounts in Harvey Mackay’s 2004 book, *We Got Fired!*: “I had mellowed by then. Sandy wasn’t going to call me. . . . I knew I was ready to say thank you for what he did for me. I also knew he and I should talk about what happened. I wanted to get this event behind me so I could move on. Part of me said I had spent sixteen years with him. Twelve or thirteen were pretty good. You can’t just look at one side and not the other. I made my own mistakes; I acknowledged I was partly to blame. Whether I was 40 percent or 60 percent to blame really didn’t matter. I felt very good about my meeting with him.” In this way, Dimon was able to turn his ouster into an event that yielded both helpful perspective and reassuring resolution. (See the sidebar “[Getting Beyond Rage and Denial.](#)”)

GETTING BEYOND RAGE AND DENIAL

One of the most important steps on the route to recovery is to confront and acknowledge failure. This can be as simple as understanding the Machiavellian politics of others. So as you set about rebuilding your career, make sure you:

- ***Remember that failure is a beginning, not an end.*** Comeback is always possible.
- ***Look to the future.*** Preemptive actions are often more effective than reactive ones—even if they only take the form of standing back and reflecting on what to do next.
- ***Help people deal with your failure.*** Even close friends may avoid you because they don't know what to say or do. Let them know that you are ready for assistance and what kind of aid would be most useful.
- ***Know your narrative.*** Reputation building involves telling and retelling your story to get your account of events out there and to explain your downfall. Be consistent.

About six months after that lunch, in March 2000, Dimon became CEO of Bank One, a huge Chicago bank that survived the merger of First Chicago and the original Banc One. That year, Bank One posted a loss of \$511 million. Three years later, under Dimon's leadership, Bank One was earning record profits of \$3.5 billion, and its stock price had soared 85%. Adding to the sweetness of vindication,

the following year Bank One merged with JPMorgan Chase, an institution with which Weill had long wanted Citigroup to merge. Dimon became CEO of the new company and is now widely regarded as one of the most influential financial executives in the world.

Of course, it's not always a good decision to sit on the sidelines and presume that justice will prevail. The highly respected Nick Nicholas, outmaneuvered as CEO of Time Warner by his skilled rival Gerald Levin, never challenged his old firm. He went off to Vail to ski at the time, awaiting a call back to service, soon becoming a very successful investor in new businesses, a professor, and a board director. But he never regained his role as the leader of a great public enterprise. Other deposed CEOs, such as Ford's Jacques Nasser, Hewlett-Packard's Carly Fiorina, IBM's John Akers, United Air Lines' Richard Ferris, and Apple's John Sculley have similarly failed to return to lead major public firms. They were considered brilliant leaders by many and were never accused of plundering the shareholders' wealth, like some rogue CEOs of recent years. But they never fought back, and they disappeared from the corner office.

The key determinant in the fight-or-flight question is the damage (or potential damage) incurred to the leader's reputation—the most important resource of all leaders. While departed CEOs and other leaders may have enough

other resources and experience to rebound, it is their reputation that will make the difference between successful career recovery and failure.

Fights that will result only in a Pyrrhic victory are best avoided. Battles of pure revenge can resemble Shakespearean tragedies, where all parties lose. Hewlett-Packard board member Tom Perkins, for example, in trying to defend his friend and fellow director George Keyworth from allegations of leaking confidential board discussions, not only brought down HP chairman Patricia Dunn but also caused his friend far greater humiliation, forcing him off the board as well. A leader must consider whether fighting the allegations will exacerbate the damage by making the accusations more public.

When, however, the allegations are not only sufficient to cause a catastrophic career setback but would also block a career comeback, then leaders need to fight back. Consider former Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon. He was a triumphant commander on the Egyptian front in the Six Day War of 1967. Fifteen years later, as minister of defense, Sharon initiated an attack on the Palestine Liberation Organization in Lebanon. Christian militias seized the opportunity to massacre hundreds of Palestinians in acts of revenge against the PLO in the Israeli-controlled Sabra and Shatila refugee camps.

In a February 21, 1983, cover story, *Time* magazine reported that these massacres were the result of a plot between Sharon and the militias to avenge the killing of Lebanon's Christian president Bashir Gemayel. Sharon sued *Time* in Israel and in New York in lengthy litigation. In both places, juries found *Time's* accusations to be false and defamatory. The magazine settled and apologized. "It was a very long and hard struggle and was worth it," Sharon said publically at the time. "I came here to prove that *Time* magazine lied: We were able to prove that *Time* did lie."

A ferocious warrior, Sharon took on this carefully calculated battle for his reputation and executed it with focus and determination. He knew that if he did not vigorously defend himself, no one else would be able to help him. Sharon could not have regained his honor and returned to public office if he had not challenged these false charges and then moved on with his life.

Recruit others into battle

Whether you fight or tactically retreat for a while, it is essential to engage others right from the start to join your battle to put your career back on track. Friends and acquaintances play an instrumental role in providing support and advice in the process of recovery. Those who really care for you can help you gain perspective on the

good and bad choices you have made. You are also more likely to make yourself vulnerable with those you trust. Without such vulnerability, you cannot hope to achieve the candid, self-critical perspective you will need to learn from your experience. Still, although family and friends can provide invaluable personal support, they may be less effective when it comes to practical career assistance. Research has shown that slight acquaintances are actually more helpful than close friends in steering you toward opportunities for new positions in other organizations.

In an acclaimed study, Stanford University's Mark Granovetter discovered that of those individuals who landed jobs through personal contacts, only 16.7% found them through people they saw at least twice a week; 55.6% found positions through acquaintances seen at least once a year. But 27.8% of job candidates found work through distant acquaintances, whom they saw less than once a year—old college friends, former workmates, or people known through professional associations. In other words, more job contacts will come to you through people you see less than once a year than from people you see twice or more a week. That's because close friends share the same networks as you do, whereas acquaintances are more likely to introduce you to new people and contacts. Indeed, through the power of acquaintance networks, you can reach almost anyone within a few steps. Thus, distant

acquaintances that don't appear to have any connection to you may prove key to your recovery when you are trying to get back on your feet.

But it's not enough to have a wide network of acquaintances. The quality of the connections, even the more distant ones, matters as well. That was the case for Home Depot's Bernie Marcus. Marcus was devastated when he was fired as CEO of Handy Dan on what he felt were trumped-up charges made by Sandy Sigoloff, the threatened boss of the parent company, Daylin. "There was a lot of self-pity on my part," Marcus told us. "I was drowning in my sorrow, going several nights at a time without sleeping. For the first time in my adult life, instead of building, I was more concerned with surviving."

Marcus, however, had an unexpected resource. Whether they were close friends and colleagues with whom he worked or acquaintances he dealt with on a casual basis, Marcus treated others with uncommon honesty, respect, and trust. This consideration was reciprocated by people in his network when he needed help; it was one of his less frequent acquaintances, Rip Fleming at Security Pacific National Bank, who made it possible for Marcus to launch Home Depot.

Marcus had raised \$2 million in seed money for the Home Depot venture, but that was not enough to get his new company off the ground. He applied to several banks

for a line of credit but was turned down every time. Eventually, he knocked at Fleming's door at Security Pacific National. Both Marcus and Fleming believed that the relationship between banker and client should amount to more than just the business transactions they conducted. Consequently, Fleming had become an adviser to Marcus at Handy Dan. Despite these strong professional ties, though, Fleming was initially reluctant to issue a line of credit until Marcus flew out to Los Angeles and sold Fleming on the idea. In the end, Security Pacific National provided a \$3.5 million line of credit, which enabled Home Depot to get up and running. Unbeknownst to Marcus, the proposal was repeatedly turned down by the bank's loan committee and was approved only when Fleming marched into the president's office with his resignation letter in hand.

How you build relationships has a huge impact on your prospects for career recovery. Marcus had a way of building relatively strong relationships even in circumstances when most people would settle for weak acquaintanceships. This capacity for affiliation is a litmus test of a leader's ability to bounce back. People who can create connections are much more likely to engender the kind of help they need when fate turns against them.

Recover your heroic status

It's not enough for you to recruit others to advance your career. To launch your comeback, you must actually *do* things to win back the support of a wider audience. To manage this, you must regain what we call your heroic status.

The great leader has a heroic persona that confers a larger-than-life presence. You can achieve this status by developing a personal dream that you offer as a public possession. If your dream is accepted, you achieve renown. If for whatever reason your public vision is ultimately discarded, you suffer the loss of both your private dream and your public identity. After a career disaster, you can rebound only if you are able to rebuild your heroic stature—that is, the public reputation with which you were previously perceived. An intrinsic part of recovering this heroic status involves getting your story out. This calls for a public campaign to educate and inform.

When a CEO is fired, the true causes for the dismissal are often deliberately hidden, as the board seeks to protect the reputation of the firm and itself. The organization often engages in elaborate face-saving activities to disguise the real nature of the exit. Euphemistically, the press reports that the CEO resigned “for personal reasons” or “to spend more time with family.” In our interviews with dismissed CEOs, we found that their greatest frustration stemmed from not being able to rebuild their heroic stature by telling

their side of the story. We have interviewed several people who had seven-figure separation agreements that were contingent on their toeing the party line when they left. That's a problem when CEOs are publicly sacrificed even though they are not guilty of the accusations that led to their ouster. In such cases, CEOs' inability to challenge and set the record straight can lead to destructive speculation in the press, which can damage their reputations so much that it becomes all but impossible to recover.

Popular wisdom holds that a deposed leader should sign the nondisparagement agreement, accept the noncompete clause, take the money, and run. Our strong belief is that such agreements are a mistake. In the end, your cash will disappear, and you won't be able to get your story out. If you agree not to speak out, be prepared to be unemployed for a number of years.

A lesser-known player in the Enron saga, Daniel Scotto, comes to mind. Scotto was the financial analyst who headed up the research department for the large global investment bank Paribas. Early on, Scotto said that Enron was losing money in all its mainstream businesses and that it was only through offshore finagling that the company was creating the image of profitability. Paribas, which was underwriting a large part of the debt, asked Scotto to recant. When he wouldn't, Paribas put him on an imposed medical leave for three weeks and then fired him. He was

forced to sign a nondisparagement agreement that hurt his ability to get his story out. Scotto has been unemployed for five years.

Martha Stewart is the best reminder that it doesn't have to be that way. As the most public example in recent times of a CEO who got her story out, Stewart is a model for how to regain your heroic status. She did it by carefully orchestrating a multitiered campaign to restore her reputation.

The day after she was indicted for obstruction of justice in the federal government's insider-trading investigation of ImClone stock, Stewart took out a full-page advertisement in *USA Today* and the *New York Times* and launched a new website, marthataalks.com. In an open letter to her public, Stewart clearly proclaimed her innocence and her intention to clear her name. She understood intuitively that when a hero stumbles, constituents have to reconcile two conflicting images of the person—the larger-than-life presence the hero once commanded and the hero's new fallen state. In her letter, Stewart managed to eliminate the confusion by making sure that people knew her side of the story. She openly denied any charges of insider trading and hammered home the unreliability of the three witnesses upon which the government based its case. Stewart very proactively helped others continue to believe in her heroic status.

Stewart's open letter was supported by a statement on her website by her attorneys, Robert G. Morvillo and John J. Tighe Jr., who challenged the media to investigate why the government waited nearly a year and a half to file the charges. "Is it because she is a woman who has successfully competed in a man's business world by virtue of her talent, hard work, and demanding standards?" they asked.

With the aid of her attorneys, Stewart ingeniously—and successfully—portrayed herself as a David struggling in a just and valiant quest against the Goliath of government. Her fans, far from abandoning a fallen star, rallied around her. The astounding strength of this sentiment is measured in the stock price of Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia. Even at the midpoint of Stewart's prison sentence, the stock had not merely rebounded—it was 50% higher than before anybody had heard of ImClone and the ill-fated stock transaction. Upon her release from prison, the share price neared an all-time high, ad revenue at her magazines picked up, and she launched two national network TV shows. The more Stewart got her story out, the more loyal her public became.

Stewart managed to provide a reassuring account of what really happened in her case. But what if you can't? What if you have truly stumbled? If you cannot refute the facts of your dismissal because they are so condemning,

show authentic remorse. The public is often enormously forgiving of genuine contrition and atonement.

Prove your mettle

Protecting your reputation by knowing how to fight unjust accusations and bringing others on board are both essential precursors to relaunching a career in the aftermath of catastrophe. Ultimately, however, you will recover fully only when you take on that next role or start a new organization. When you show that you can still perform at a credible or superior level, others will begin to think of you as having the mettle to triumph over your career calamity. (See the sidebar “[How to Come Back.](#)”)

Showing mettle is not easy. Fallen leaders face many barriers on the path to recovery, not least of which are doubts in their own ability to get back to the top. As one fired CEO told us, “I’d never sit here and say, ‘Geez, all I have to do is just replicate and do it again.’ The chances of doing it again are pretty small.” Yet leaders who rebound are unfailingly those who get over this doubt about their ability to do it again. Even when forced from familiar arenas into totally new fields, some leaders remain unafraid of trying new ventures. This capacity to bounce back from adversity—to prove your inner strength once more by

overcoming your shattered confidence—is critical to earning lasting greatness.

HOW TO COME BACK

Our interviews with some 300 derailed CEOs and other professionals, as well as our scholarly leadership research, consulting assignments, and personal experiences, have brought to light five key steps for rebounding from career disaster. Anyone trying to recover from a catastrophic setback can use these steps to match, or even exceed, their past accomplishments.

- ***Decide how to fight back.*** Pyrrhic victories will hurt you by calling attention to the accusations leveled against you. But when your reputation is unfairly damaged, you must take quick action.
- ***Recruit others into battle.*** Friends and family can provide comfort and, perhaps, some perspective in your hour of need. But acquaintances may be more important in landing that next job.
- ***Recover your heroic status.*** Deposed leaders are often advised to sign nondisparagement agreements. Don't do it. Engage instead in a multitiered campaign to clear your reputation and restore your stature.
- ***Prove your mettle.*** After suffering career disaster, you will probably have doubts about your ability to get back to the top. You must overcome that insecurity and in the process find the courage to prove to others—and yourself—that you have not lost your magic touch.

- ***Rediscover your heroic mission.*** It is the single-minded pursuit of a lasting legacy that sets great leaders apart. To recover from a disastrous setback, find a new heroic mission that renews your passion and creates new meaning in your life.
-

Take Mickey Drexler. When Gap founder Donald Fisher poached Drexler away from Ann Taylor in 1983, the Gap was struggling to compete, since it sold the same brands of clothing as everyone else and was caught in a pricing game. Drexler expanded the retailer beyond the core Gap stores to brand extension such as GapKids, babyGap, and GapBody, as well as introducing other complementary brands, including Banana Republic and Old Navy. Between the time he arrived in 1983 and 2000, Gap's sales increased from \$480 million to \$13.7 billion, and its stock rose 169-fold.

Then things began to go awry. Drexler was accused of having lost his touch as a prescient merchant; suspicion arose in the minds of analysts and in the media that the goods had become too trendy. Although some people have suggested that the real problem was that Fisher's brother had built too many stores too close to one another, Drexler was blamed for the slump, as same-store sales dropped every quarter for two years, and the stock plummeted 75%.

On May 21, 2002, Drexler presented the upcoming season's merchandise to the board, confident that he had a great selling line for the fall. It wasn't enough for the directors, and the next morning Fisher fired him, believing that the company was now too large for Drexler's hands-on management style.

Drexler was by this time independently wealthy, but he was nonetheless determined to prove that the failures of the previous two years were not primarily his fault and did not reflect his abilities. He knew that the only way to restore his belief in himself, as well as other people's confidence in him, was to return to a role in which he could once again demonstrate his expertise. He turned down a multimillion-dollar severance package from Gap because it contained a noncompete clause. After he explored a few other avenues, opportunity came knocking in the guise of struggling fashion retailer J.Crew.

With only about 200 stores, J.Crew was a small fraction of the Gap's size and consequently much more amenable to Drexler's hands-on style, giving him a greater opportunity to make an impact. Drexler invested \$10 million of his own money to buy a 22% stake in the company from the retailer's private owner, the investment firm Texas Pacific. He took a salary that was less than a tenth of what he had earned at his former employer. "You've no idea how much

it's costing me to run this company," he joked in a *New York* magazine article shortly after taking over.

The results more than proved that Drexler still had the right stuff. J.Crew rebounded from a \$30 million operating loss in 2003 to an operating profit of over \$37 million in 2004. Same-store sales per square foot, one of the key metrics in retailing, rose 18% from \$338 to \$400, while at his old employer, sales per square foot dropped 3%. By the summer of 2006, Drexler had increased both sales and profits by 20% and launched a wildly embraced IPO to take J.Crew public. The media celebrated his recovery and acknowledged his obvious talent.

For Drexler, as for others, the comeback required him to prove his worth in a situation that was perceived to be enormously difficult. Start-ups or turnarounds are common contexts in which fallen leaders can recover grace. It is in these demanding situations that leaders find the mettle to prove to themselves and to others that they have not lost their magic touch and that no obstacle is too great to overcome in their quest for return.

Rediscover your heroic mission

Most great leaders want to build a legacy that will last beyond their lifetime. This does not mean having their names etched on an ivy-clad university edifice but rather

advancing society by building and leading an organization. This is what we call the leader's heroic mission.

Most of the leaders we have profiled in this article were deeply engaged in building a lasting legacy even before they suffered their career setbacks. It is the loss of this mission that really raises a derailment to catastrophic proportions in the leader's own mind, since it puts at risk a lifetime of achievement. On the day Steve Jobs was fired from Apple in 1985, for example, his friend Mike Murray was so concerned about Jobs's reaction that he went over to Jobs's house and sat with him for hours until Murray was convinced that Jobs would not commit suicide.

Jobs did not wallow in despair for long. A week after his ouster from Apple, he flew to Europe and, after a few days in Paris, headed for the Tuscan hills of northern Italy, where he bought a bicycle and a sleeping bag and camped out under the stars, contemplating what he would do next. From Italy, he went to Sweden and then to Russia before returning home. Once back in California, with his passion and ambition renewed, Jobs set about re-creating himself as a force in the IT world. He went on to found another computer company, NeXT, which Apple purchased in 1996 for \$400 million, at which point Jobs returned to Apple and at the same time became the driving force behind the hugely successful computer-graphics studio Pixar. Once back at Apple, Jobs revived and reenergized the company

with breakthrough, high-design products, such as the iMac, iBook, and iPod, and took the company into emerging businesses, such as iTunes.

Like Martha Stewart, Steve Jobs was able to recapture his original heroic mission. Other deposed leaders, however, must truly start again because the door to their familiar field is firmly closed, and they must seek new opportunities and create a totally new heroic mission.

That's what Drexel Burnham Lambert financier Michael Milken, the imaginative "king of the junk bonds," had to do. Milken's life was almost the incarnation of the American dream. Born on the Fourth of July, Milken had become a billionaire by his mid-forties and one of the most influential financiers in the world. Then it all came tumbling down. He was charged with a 98-count criminal indictment, and a massive civil case was brought against him by the SEC for insider trading, stock parking, price manipulation, racketeering, and defrauding customers, among other crimes. He ended up pleading guilty to six relatively minor counts. In November 1990, he was sentenced to 10 years in prison, agreed to pay \$600 million at the time, and ended up paying a further \$42 million over a probation violation. After serving 22 months, Milken was released early for cooperating with other inquiries. But he was barred from the securities industry for life.

A week later, Milken was diagnosed with prostate cancer and was told he had 12 to 18 months to live. He immediately turned his maniacal zeal into a new heroic mission to conquer this disease. Through aggressive treatment and his own dietary research, he survived to build a huge foundation supporting research to battle prostate cancer. He also created an economic research institute that attracts the world's top scientific, political, religious, and business leaders. Milken still argues that he was wrongly accused. Others may disagree, but few would doubt that he has earned restitution. The public has come to accept that he has paid for his crimes, and there has even been some reconsideration of their actual severity.

It is the single-minded, passionate pursuit of a heroic mission that sets leaders like Steve Jobs and Michael Milken and Jimmy Carter apart from the general population, and it is what attracts and motivates followers to join them. In the worst of cases, to have that life purpose ripped from you and to be prohibited from its further pursuit can leave an unbearable void and doubts as to your reason for being. Finding a new mission to replace your lifelong purpose can be a great struggle, but one that is necessary if you are to recover.

The tragedies and triumphant comebacks of the leaders we have profiled in this article can seem remote, bordering on the mythological, perhaps. But their stories point to

important lessons about recovering from career catastrophe. Stunning comeback is possible in all industries, though the challenges vary according to the leadership norms of each field's culture. For example, clergy ensnarled in publicized sex scandals will probably see their careers dissolve, whereas entertainment figures may not only recover but actually benefit from notoriety. Where one profession values trust, another values celebrity. Thus, recovery plans must be adapted to the cultures of different industries.

Whatever the arena in which your recovery takes shape, the important thing to remember is that we all have choices in life, even in defeat. We can lose our health, our loved ones, our jobs, but much can be saved. No one can truly define success and failure for us—only we can define that for ourselves. No one can take away our dignity unless we surrender it. No one can take away our hope and pride unless we relinquish them. No one can steal our creativity, imagination, and skills unless we stop thinking. No one can stop us from rebounding unless we give up.

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Resilience Is About How You Recharge, Not How You Endure

By Shawn Achor and Michelle Gielan

As constant travelers and parents of a 2-year-old, we sometimes fantasize about how much work we can do when one of us gets on a plane, undistracted by phones, friends, and *Finding Nemo*. We race to get all our ground work done: packing, going through TSA, doing a last-minute work call, calling each other, boarding the plane. Then, when we try to have that amazing in-flight work session, we get nothing done. Even worse, after refreshing our email or reading the same studies over and over, we are too exhausted when we land to soldier on with the emails that have inevitably still piled up.

Why should flying deplete us? We're just sitting there doing nothing. Why can't we be tougher—more resilient and determined in our work—so we can accomplish all of

the goals we set for ourselves? Through our current research, we have come to realize that the problem is not our hectic schedule or the plane travel itself; the problem comes from a misunderstanding of what it means to be resilient and the resulting impact of overworking.

We often take a militaristic, “tough” approach to resilience and grit. We imagine a marine slogging through the mud, a boxer going one more round, or a football player picking himself up off the turf for one more play. We believe that the longer we tough it out, the tougher we are, and therefore the more successful we will be. However, this entire conception is scientifically inaccurate.

The very lack of a recovery period is dramatically holding back our collective ability to be resilient and successful. Research has found that there is a direct correlation between lack of recovery and increased incidence of health and safety problems.¹ And lack of recovery—whether by disrupting sleep with thoughts of work or having continuous cognitive arousal by watching our phones—is costing our companies \$62 billion a year (that’s billion, not million) in lost productivity.²

And just because work stops, it doesn’t mean we are recovering. We “stop” work sometimes at 5 p.m., but then we spend the night wrestling with solutions to work problems, talking about our work over dinner, and falling asleep thinking about how much work we’ll do tomorrow.

In a study released last month, researchers from Norway found that 7.8% of Norwegians have become workaholics.³ The scientists cite a definition of “workaholism” as “being overly concerned about work, driven by an uncontrollable work motivation, and investing so much time and effort to work that it impairs other important life areas.”⁴

We believe that this definition applies to the majority of American workers (including those who read HBR), and this prompted us to begin a study of workaholism in the United States. Our study will use a large corporate data set from a major medical company to examine how technology extends our working hours and thus interferes with necessary cognitive recovery. We believe this is resulting in huge health care costs and high turnover rates for employers.

Misconceptions about resilience is often bred from an early age. Parents trying to teach their children resilience might celebrate a high school student staying up until 3 a.m. to finish a science fair project. What a distortion of resilience! A resilient child is a well-rested one. When an exhausted student goes to school, he risks hurting everyone on the road with his impaired driving, he doesn't have the cognitive resources to do well on his English test, he has lower self-control with his friends, and at home, he is moody with his parents. Overwork and exhaustion are the

opposite of resilience. And the bad habits we learn when we're young only magnify when we hit the workforce.

In her excellent book *The Sleep Revolution*, Arianna Huffington wrote, "We sacrifice sleep in the name of productivity, but ironically our loss of sleep, despite the extra hours we spend at work, adds up to 11 days of lost productivity per year per worker, or about \$2,280."

The key to resilience is trying really hard, then stopping, recovering, and then trying again. This conclusion is based on biology. Homeostasis is a fundamental biological concept describing the ability of the brain to continuously restore and sustain wellbeing.⁵ Positive neuroscientist Brent Furl from Texas A&M University coined the term "homeostatic value" to describe the value that certain actions have for creating equilibrium, and thus well-being, in the body. When the body is out of alignment from overworking, we waste vast mental and physical resources trying to return to balance before we can move forward.

As *Power of Full Engagement* authors Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz have written, if you have too much time in the performance zone, you need more time in the recovery zone; otherwise you risk burnout. Mustering your resources to "try hard" requires burning energy in order to overcome your currently low arousal level. This is called "upregulation." It also exacerbates exhaustion. Thus, the

more imbalanced we become due to overworking, the more value there is in activities that allow us to return to a state of balance. The value of a recovery period rises in proportion to the amount of work required of us.

So how do we recover and build resilience? Most people assume that if you stop doing a task like answering emails or writing a paper that your brain will naturally recover, that when you start again later in the day or the next morning, you'll have your energy back. But surely everyone reading this has had times when they lie in bed for hours, unable to fall asleep because their brain is thinking about work. If you lie in bed for eight hours, you may have rested, but you can still feel exhausted the next day. That's because rest and recovery are not the same thing. Stopping does not equal recovering.

If you're trying to build resilience at work, you need adequate internal and external recovery periods. As researchers Fred R. H. Zijlstra, Mark Cropley, and Leif W. Rydstedt write in their 2014 paper: "Internal recovery refers to the shorter periods of relaxation that take place within the frames of the workday or the work setting in the form of short scheduled or unscheduled breaks, by shifting attention or changing to other work tasks when the mental or physical resources required for the initial task are temporarily depleted or exhausted. External recovery refers to actions that take place outside of work—e.g. in the

free time between the workdays, and during weekends, holidays or vacations.”⁶ If after work you lie around on your bed and get riled up by political commentary on your phone or get stressed thinking about decisions about how to renovate your home, your brain has not received a break from high mental arousal states. Our brains need a rest as much as our bodies do.

If you really want to build resilience, you can start by strategically stopping. Give yourself the resources to be tough by creating internal and external recovery periods. In her upcoming book *The Future of Happiness*, based on her work at Yale Business School, Amy Blankson describes how to strategically stop during the day by using technology to control overworking.⁷ She suggests downloading the Instant or Moment apps to see how many times you turn on your phone each day. The average person turns on their phone 150 times every day.⁸ If every distraction took only one minute (which would be seriously optimistic), that would account for 2.5 hours of every day.

You can use apps like Offtime or Unplugged to create tech free zones by strategically scheduling automatic airplane modes. In addition, you can take a cognitive break every 90 minutes to recharge your batteries. Try to not have lunch at your desk, but instead spend time outside or with your friends—not talking about work. Take all of your

paid time off, which not only gives you recovery periods but raises your productivity and the likelihood of promotion.⁹

As for us, we've started using our plane time as a work-free zone and thus as time to dip into the recovery phase. The results have been fantastic. We are usually tired already by the time we get on a plane, and the cramped space and spotty internet connection make work more challenging. Now, instead of swimming upstream, we relax, meditate, sleep, watch movies, journal, or listen to entertaining podcasts. And when we get off the plane, instead of being depleted, we feel rejuvenated and ready to return to the performance zone.

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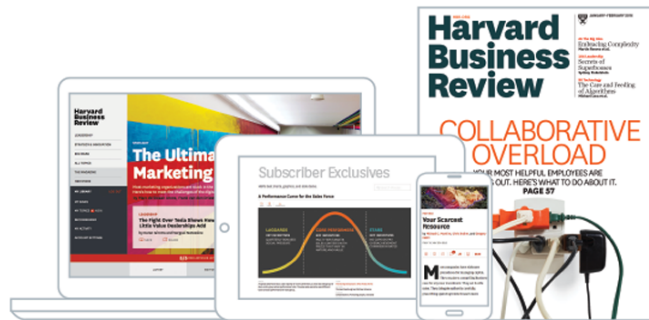
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